



# THE DEATH OF A NOBODY

Jules Romain

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# THE DEATH OF A NOBODY. BY JULES ROMAINS

TRANSLATED BY DESMOND MACCARTHY  
AND SYDNEY WATERLOW



NEW YORK  
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1914



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R635  
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TO  
ROGER FRY



## DEDICATION

MY DEAR ROGER,

Because we so have often talked about modern French books together, because you give new methods and new ideas the benefit of doubt, hospitably taking them in, at any rate on approval, because you believe that something analogous to Post-Impressionism is possible and desirable in literature, because in M. Jules Romains' work there is a flavour of it, we dedicate this translation to you.

It was not only the wish that people who do not read French should get some notion of an original curious book, which started us upon translating *Mort de Quelqu'un*. M. Romains' methods and style are unlike anything in our literature, and we wanted to see if they would do in English. He has a peculiar view of what facts and feelings are most worth noticing in the lives of those he describes, and he has found a style which passes easily from fixing, with odd intensity, details so ordinary that other novelists omit them as things taken for

granted, to describing emotions so elusive, so large and so obscure that they too have been ignored. He simplifies emotions in an unexpected way, yet he constantly catches at experiences as near the verge of unintelligibility as a bat's cry to what cannot be heard.

If he had been born an Englishman perhaps he would have written the same kind of books, but he would have written them differently. He would have left some things out and put others in; for in each language different things can be better expressed or better combined. A translator cannot attempt to write the book his author would have written in another tongue. He must follow, if not step by step, yet pretty closely, the path of the original, only substituting idioms and changing metaphors when it is beyond his power to suggest the grace as well as the meaning of the original. But sometimes this humble task has a special interest.

When the methods of the author are new, and the atmosphere he creates is strange, an attempt to re-create that atmosphere and make those methods work in one's native language may suggest more new possibilities in method to a reader than the original work

itself. The reader divines quickly from the very failures of the translator what will not "do" in English, or what, if he is a writer as well as a reader, he can lift if he likes. We thought *Mort de Quelqu'un* a book of this kind; and, speaking for myself, it struck me as opening up a path in a direction towards which some writers are feeling their way. I can conceive M. Jules Romains having an influence in this country upon a few—a few who may influence others.

There is a third reason why we translated it. It is a book with "ideas" in it, and ideas derived from philosophers who, it is said, are influencing the young generation in France. In the writing of *Mort de Quelqu'un* the philosophies of M. Bergson and of M. Durkheim have clearly played a part. When people have heard much talk about contemporary influences in another country it is always interesting to them to see an example of these influences on its literature. This book is full of instances of "group consciousness," such as M. Durkheim has elaborated and classified. When two or three are gathered together in M. Romains' novel, what he is most interested in is the kind of composite consciousness that results. The



feelings of each individual, under his analysis, appear as haphazard, trivial and inconsequent compared with those which each experiences as a member of a particular group. In the same way the actions, lives, deaths of individuals are shown to be less interesting in themselves than when considered as moments in a great process. At the end of the book there is an attempt to portray in the emotions of a young man walking down a rain-swept boulevard one late afternoon, a conception of the world not unlike that which M. Bergson's philosophy suggests. How far such experiences are engendered by reading M. Bergson, and how far they are independent, M. Romain can tell better than we. You may be in our position of not being able to believe a word of M. Bergson's philosophy, yet this lack of credulity has not, I assure you, prevented our enjoyment of a conception of the world which, though it may be as untrue as Hegel's, shows things in a new exciting light, and in the hands of an artist has become imaginative. *Mort de Quelqu'un* is a queer book. Individuality—character, the very pivot on which the art of the novelist has turned hitherto, is here made of no account. Individuals are as of little

importance as wisps of straw riding down a river in flood-time, melting and dissolving as they pass, one straw going this way, one that ; congregated together with bubbles and sticks they may make a noticeable patch on the sliding surface for a moment ; detaching themselves again and still borne onwards, they are gradually dismembered and scattered and finally—lost? Well, in a sense. Such at least is the story of the death of Jacques Godard, a nobody ; and in his lifetime, according to M. Romain, his existence was hardly more compact. I have said enough perhaps to persuade you to look into our translation. It is, we fear, a mirror at the back of which the mercury has rusted in patches. Still, if it cannot reflect the beautiful complexion of the original, the features of it will be clearly discernible there.

Yours very sincerely,

DESMOND MACCARTHY.





## I

ONE afternoon Jacques Godard, walking past the Panthéon, suddenly thought to himself : " Why, I have never been up to the top in my life. What waste ! Every excursionist treats himself to that, and I, who have lived in Paris thirty-five years, have only seen the dome from the pavement."

Into the monument he went, and, following the directions of the caretaker, he began to plod up the spiral staircase.

There were so many steps, and the movement of a man toiling upwards through this massive structure seemed so insignificant, that Godard felt like a minute insect crawling up a wall.

Upright at last upon the highest platform, several things astonished him : first, that there should be such a wind, and that on this mild spring day, three hundred feet above the streets, the air should have such an eager, wintry nip in it. Besides, he had expected the height to give him a different feeling. Was it greater or less than he had expected ? He could not tell. Above all, the appearance of Paris disconcerted him. He had understood

before that Paris was large, but in the abstract, emotionless sort of way in which he knew the Sahara was a desert. His old profession, too, had not fitted him to grasp the size of a town. He had been an engine-driver on an express, and he was used to rushing in four minutes from its centre to its ramparts. Speed belittles space : congregated masses of buildings and huddled suburbs melt before it ; walls and houses lose solidity as they stream past a train. Almost before the first whistle was silent the circumference of Paris would collapse behind him like a pricked balloon. On the return journey Godard used to see the town ahead of him—for an instant—like a pile of muddy snow which, the next, the engine had swept aside. The fortifications passed in a flash. Then he had only to shut off steam and put on the brakes in order to glide on, the wheels grinding on the rails and bumping over the points, on under smoky bridges, till he touched the buffers of the terminus.

But from up here what astonished him even more than the size of the town was its complexity. What extraordinary differences between the blocks of houses ! What a tangle of lives underneath that covering ! The rumpled panorama of roofs and walls lay like a heaving, tumbled blanket over living forms still more furiously agitated.

His eyes searched the distance for his own

quarter and his own home. After long hesitation he marked down a little white reef rising out of the mist. "So it's in that mess over there." Then he felt oddly moved. An uncomfortable kind of regret took possession of him, like the sinking feeling of a man who has missed a treat. "To think I live down there, all the time in the middle of *this*!" The discovery pleased him less than the sense of what he had already missed dejected him. He reproached himself for having only understood so late what energies lay under cover of the city smoke. How many things had followed the windings of those streets, driven and directed by how many different forces! What criss-crossing of interests and relationships, just like the iron trusses reinforcing a block of concrete! And nothing of all this life had ever passed the threshold of his little widower's flat! "I never go out. I never amuse myself; I don't exist!"

More to the left he noticed a green blur which he identified as the cemetery of Père Lachaise. "I am a free man. Yes, free as the rest. But who bothers about me? Who ever thinks of a poor fellow like me? It wouldn't make much difference if I died."

His glance now took in the whole town. "I should like to know if one single person in it ever thinks of me." He had no wish to go down again. He would only have wanted to



go if one of those hundreds of thousands of forces had magically transported him home in a second, home to his room, where he would have felt no longer the stupefaction of a solitary being.

In the eyes of the world Godard's existence was confined to two narrow rooms at Ménil-montant. He had retired five years ago, and he had not managed to create for himself a little round of humble pleasures. At most he amused himself by framing old illustrations, and by gilding wooden objects which he made himself. He often thought about his wife. Sometimes, in the evening, before going to bed, the hush in his room seemed about to whisper something ominous, and his shoulders shivered as though a cold fog had crept behind his back and dimmed the lamp. Then he would miss the dead woman and promise to go next day to her grave. He always kept his word. About one o'clock he would take the electric tram. In the sunlight, in the suburban cemetery, his heart grew softer and lighter, and before going back it was his habit to take a glass of beer, always at the same house and at the same marble-topped table, a table which had a crack across it like that which the Seine makes across the map of Paris.

Godard did a good deal of thinking, though

he read little. He read little, because he felt it tiresome to go on adding new ideas to what he had known since childhood, as extra carriages are added to a train. Still, he had formed ideas of his own about various things, and what he regretted most was that he had not sufficient command of educated language to give them a less confused expression. Young ideas kept sprouting up in his mind without coming to maturity. In particular he had pondered upon Time. Time seemed to him something quite arbitrary and elastic. He found it difficult to believe it was a dependable entity, and clocks seemed to him fallacious mechanisms for measuring it. Nor did he believe with any more certainty that the appearance of things really corresponded to their nature, or that the appearance they wore was the only one possible. He had seen too many objects huddle or scatter, telescope together or spread out, according to the speed of his engine, to believe that! He recalled the look of railings and of lines of trees as he had passed them; the many kinds of movements which spring up in the path of a travelling train, and man on foot never sees. He ended by concluding that these aspects of things were just as trustworthy as those perceived by people who do not move fast.

Jacques Godard's life, as far as his own consciousness was concerned, was a meagre

affair ; in the consciousness of others it scarcely existed at all.

He was a member of a club, the " *Enfants du Velay*," which met on the first Saturday of every month at a café in the Rue de Rivoli. Godard did not often attend these reunions, but it happened sometimes that his name would be spoken at one of the tables, and that his image would hover for a moment upon the clouds of tobacco and the murmur of voices.

During the month the members of the club would now and again call each other to mind. At such times it was as if the phantom of a comrade had been bidden sit at his friends' table. Godard, too, profited by these charities of memory. He dined in his own room, lonely and dull, eating food he had cooked himself over a spirit lamp. But a sort of emanation of his being would sometimes appear in another place far off, flicker like a marsh-light above a family circle for a moment, and go out.

He was still in touch with his old railway mates. They recalled him as a thick-set, ruddy man, easy in humour, cordial in manner, but a little close-fisted, one who never offered to treat a friend. In this shape he haunted occasionally the firesides of other pensioned railway servants, or would suddenly appear before an old engine-driver standing on his platform and rushing full speed through space.

Lastly, a Godard of different aspect had his



being on the slopes of a valley among the hills of Velay. There, there stood a little slate-roofed house in which Jacques Godard's body had been born, and his father and mother, now both past eighty, still lived. The memory of Jacques filled the big kitchen, diffusing itself between floor and rafters with the smell of burning logs, brushing the table, reflecting itself in little mirrors made by a glass of wine or water, crouching in front of the sooty hearth and flying sparks, thrilled through and through by the cosy vibrations of the kitchen clock. In the summer dusk the old people, sitting side by side in the yard, the father on the pole of a cart, the mother on a chair with her work or her ebony rosary in her lap, would begin dreaming. Their son would be between them, between the pole of the cart and the rickety chair. With them he would taste the mountain air and feel the evening breeze refreshing the leaves. Jacques was with them, invisible, beloved ; a younger Jacques, with brown hair, round face and neat moustache. He spoke the patois ; his jokes and mischievous tricks were all remembered, and they would fain have thrown their arms about him. When a letter came he began to live even more intensely, almost indeed as though his body itself was there. At such times he was more like himself too, wrinkled, with grey hairs on his temples and twinges of rheumatism when

rain was in the air. The news that a letter had come ran up the village street, scattered and went in at any cottage door, like the chickens from other people's yards. Everybody knew that Jacques had written home, that he was still in town, that he had recovered from an influenza. These straws kindled a fire which kept his memory warm. All the village called Godard to mind. On such occasions he was present wherever anyone sat up at night. He went with them to barn doors with lantern and stool to milk the sleepy cows.

Thus it was that Godard, detached from himself, floated upon the world like a spray of seaweed torn from its rock.

## II

Two days after going up to the top of the Panthéon Godard felt a pain in his back. At first he persisted in taking no notice of it. When he was in pain he hurriedly seized hold of any thought to distract himself. But often he could think of nothing, or if he did get hold of an idea he dropped it at once to ask himself: "What can be the matter? I must have caught a chill. I've stood worse cold on my engine. But when one's old . . ." His mind kept returning to his trouble as a dog shooed off from offal, creeping round, ears down, returns to it again. He regretted he had retired: "I watch myself too closely. If I had work this wouldn't last five minutes." Then he would bestir himself, dust the furniture, polish a pair of shoes. The smallest occupation soothed him a little. He would sit himself down again, feeling more cheerful, and encourage pleasant thoughts. "I shall buy a pair of soft, roomy slippers, and my corn won't hurt me any more." Then he promised himself a walk down the boulevards after dinner. He saw vaguely the drifting mass of black foot-farers, the nodding hats of women,

the swarm of eyes which glided and glittered by, ever passing each other on the same level, like a silent flight of shining beetles.

Little by little he ceased to think. It was as though his soul, draining from his head and trickling into his body, had formed there a sort of marsh, dense and obscure.

He grew more and more gloomy ; shadows of despair began to deepen. He no longer tried to drive his soul away from the mysterious pain ; on the contrary, he kept his attention fixed upon it ; he leant upon it with all the weight of his mind, forgetting with a sort of bitter pleasure the rest of his body, as though to ferment the obscure disturbance gathering inside him. Suddenly his body protested, crying out that it wished to live in spite of this rebellious element bestirring itself within. His soul became again the soul of his whole body and loathed the little pain.

Godard got up in a kind of rage : " It is absurd to let oneself be tortured by this ! " He forced himself to move with a brisk cheerfulness. He hummed an old tune. He thumped himself in the back, on the place where the pain was worst, saying : " Stop, you swine."

He endured eight days of fever. The morning of the ninth day, at the hour when the curtains of the room let in the first handful of sunlight, he felt a sudden relief. His mind,



which for more than a week had cowered over his disease, unbent, straightened itself, still aching-stiff, yet almost easy. The light seemed to him beautiful, and above all he felt happy to be able to notice the light—to notice anything which was not inside him and was not pain. Delirium shook him no longer. He even thought himself calm and clear.

Then his attention relaxed, scattered, and started running hither and thither, through his body, like a pile of coins which has been upset. What consciousness remained in his head, was not, at first, much frightened, seeming indeed almost resigned. Then the very centre of his soul received a violent shock, and made an effort to gather everything together. Two contradictory impulses tore his very being. . . . clashings, jostlings, palpitations, internal sparks—his heart had stopped.

Godard had time to think quite distinctly: "I'm dead. Where am I going? My God!" He was aware that his soul was crumbling away again. Then he experienced a sensation entirely new. Something which was in him, which had served no purpose but to hold his life together, something contractive, elastic, formative, a sort of main-spring, suddenly let go, relaxed, expanded, and with a shiver of released vibrations lost itself in space.

And presently he knew no longer that he was dead.

A quarter of an hour after the death of Jacques Godard the hall porter mounted the four flights of stairs up to Godard's flat. "He was very bad yesterday. He ought to have someone to look after him. He didn't want me to stop, or to tell his relations, or to get him a nurse. He's stingy, that's what he is," he thought to himself. He entered, glanced at the bottles, saw they were in order, and went up to the bed. Godard's head had a rigid look, as though the air about it were frozen into a block of lucid ice. The porter knew that his lodger was dead.

He stood motionless for a moment, took up one or two of the bottles, read the labels, sighed. Then he went to the window and drew back the double curtains, taking care to loop them back symmetrically. Then he returned to the dead man's side, looked at him, and reflected.

He was dead, quite dead. He thought no more about anything. He did not even know that he no longer existed, or perhaps, from the height of heaven, he was looking at himself stretched there, his head sticking out of the bed-clothes like a bricklayer buried under a fall of rubble. One might speak to him, call him by his name, "Godard!" or "Jacques Godard!" or address him as usual as "M. Godard," or shake him by the shoulder—he would not answer.

To be sure he still existed, in a way. He had not disappeared. He would be put in a coffin and taken to the cemetery. He would rot slowly. Something of him would always remain. The change was that the body would never again feel anything that happened to it. It would be shovelled into the ditch and care not at all.

"What a fool I am ! If it did feel he wouldn't be dead. It's as plain as a pikestaff !"

He turned back again to the window, and, without asking himself why he did it, drew the curtains to, across the daylight. The face of the dead man desired light no longer. His impulse to draw those curtains came from the dead man. So he was not quite dead yet, for he was still causing things to happen. His soul was not in its accustomed place—that was all.

The porter went up to the corpse and closed its eyes. It was the proper thing to do—besides, the stare of the dead man shocked him by its want of meaning. The eyes are the finest points at which the soul touches the outside world ; and now there was no soul behind that gaze ; it was better to close them, like the room itself. Black emptiness done up in a parcel—the body was the wrapper—that was all that was left of what had once sent forth light. It was right and proper to heap shadows upon it till the deeper

obscurity of the grave should be ready to cover it.

The porter went down the stairs, his back a little bent under the weight of a kind of uneasiness which made him careful of his footing.

"Think of the fuss there'll be about him! We talk about death as though it was the end of everything, but that's only the way we talk. I don't believe in heaven or hell, but all the same one doesn't slip out of life as easy as all that."

He crossed the third-floor landing.

"The family, flowers, mutes . . . what a fuss. People don't make so much about you when you're alive. It's a pity one can't attend one's own funeral."

He stopped on the second floor.

"At present no one knows he is dead except me. I am the only person who is in the secret; other people are imagining all sorts of things. But only one is true: he is dead. He doesn't know it himself . . . only I. I know it. It's queer."

He went on down the stairs.

"The difference it will make! People know a man's alive; then they know he's dead . . . his relations, his pals. . . . It's difficult to convince oneself at first that a man one knows is dead." The porter went into his lodge to hunt for the address of Godard's parents,



which the sick man had given him, written on the edge of a newspaper, in case anything should happen. Then he started out for the post office to send a telegram.

He walked fairly quickly, passing the shops without heeding them. He was brought up by a row of milk-cans in front of a dairy. "I've left him. He is alone up there," he thought. Yet after all that corpse on the bed was no longer anything at all. Jacques Godard, the ex-railway servant, was not in his flat on the fourth floor. The soul inside him had dissolved or flown away.

"Meanwhile, if I tell nobody, if I don't send the telegram, he is only dead to himself and to me. Other people will think of him as a living man."

The porter ended by asking himself how far Godard could be said to be dead.

He went into the post office, chose a desk, and wrote on the form the words : " Son died to-day at his lodgings."

When he handed in the paper at the pigeon-hole he experienced a kind of pleasure, which appeared to him a complex and superior one. Was not he, unimportant individual that he was, the source of a piece of news which would traverse space and stir the thoughts of other men ? He figured to himself the proud satisfaction of those who repeatedly send important news flying in all directions every day.

He envied business men, agents, journalists, directors whose thoughts and words spread themselves like a sensitive web over the world. He recalled his own pride and excitement when as a little boy he had once left his game of marbles on the pavement to rush panting upstairs crying out: "Mamma! a man has been run over."

He left the post office to go to the town hall and inform the medical officer of health. He found he was feeling a little sad, and he congratulated himself on being so genuinely touched by the death of a tenant, but gradually his sadness became less agreeable. He experienced a feeling of anti-climax not untinged with bitterness, as though he were saying to himself, "So that's all? I expected something better."

The porter felt that his importance had shrunk in the last quarter of an hour. Jacques Godard's death was now no longer a private asset belonging to himself alone. He had let it escape like a fly he might have held gloomily buzzing in his hand; it had flown, and it was too late to recapture it. He felt regretful, as though he had relinquished a privilege which distinguished him among men. It seemed to him that for a little time he had been the repository of some precious essence. Certainly it had given him pleasure to send unlooked for news thrilling along the telegraph wires.

But it would have been still sweeter to seal up a truth for good and all, to know, he alone, that a man lay underground, that a fellow-being existed no more, and that his body was rotting somewhere. That was a delight the *bon Dieu* might sometimes enjoy, whose life had not, after all, many distractions: the Grand Turk too, and the Czar, perhaps even an occasional policeman.

The porter's gaze fell on a workman, a flower-girl, a street-hawker. "Precious little they care whether he's dead or not. They've never seen him or thought of him. Think of it, there are some people whom nobody knows, who die alone to themselves!"

Jacques Godard was no longer in his body, in which the maggots were beginning their work; neither was he in the crowd upon the street.

The porter felt as though he had been let into a secret. What did he know? Something which would never be revealed to that woman in red over there and that hairdresser's assistant. The sense of what he knew came about him like an atmosphere, covering him all over like a cloak.

At the bottom of one of the houses was a greengrocer's shop, leafy, abundant, overflowing like a horn of plenty into the road, or like a little fresh spring at the foot of a black rock.

The porter was a customer. He crossed

the road, looked into the shop and spoke to the proprietor.

"Going strong?" Then he added: "Have you heard? . . . But perhaps you don't even know him. . . . One of my tenants hopped the twig this morning. . . . He was warm when I found him. You could have knocked me down with a feather!"

"Did he kill himself?"

"Oh no; a chill, pleurisy. He caught it last week. A fellow called Jacques Godard . . . retired engine-driver."

"I don't know the name. He didn't give me his custom, I think. But—I see so many."

The porter did not allow himself to feel actually astonished at this answer. He had even anticipated it. But he felt a little shock, something like surprise. It was not unlike the sensation of a Frenchman who, travelling east, suddenly comes on one of the posts which mark the frontier. He was touching one of the points at which, precisely, Jacques Godard began to be nothing at all. From there onwards, one could say to oneself without the smallest hesitation that Godard was really dead.

On his return home, in the hall, he passed the bank clerk who lived on the third floor. He felt a desire to tell him in detail all he knew about the event which possessed his mind. But he held his tongue, for he did not like this



lodger much and felt vaguely uneasy whenever they stopped and stood face to face.

He preferred to go into his lodge and rest. The cupboard with its looking-glass door gleamed at the end of the room. He looked at himself in the glass. In between his body and its reflection lay the whole space of the cosy room he knew so well.

The dead man was at one end of the house, up above. In between the corpse lying stretched out there and the porter who knew it was there, was a whole houseful of people who knew nothing.

"I'm a fool. I ought to have informed people. Here I am in my chair. It's old age . . . me too."

First he went to the butcher, whose shop was on the right of the door, whose hatchet and scales he could hear through the partition.

"What do you think! M. Godard died this morning."

"Poor old chap!"

"I don't think he suffered much."

"Ah, at his age one doesn't get over things. Any family?"

"No—yes. He has a father and mother."

"Father and mother? Well . . . they must be at least a hundred."

"Very likely. This may kill them."

He informed the people on the first floor,

a family on the second, who were kindly folk, then the neighbours on the fourth. They came out on the landing and entered the dead man's room.

They made a little group huddled between the door and the wall, some distance from the bed. The porter went nearer and put his hand on the bed-clothes. There was silence. The soft, shadowy light disposed these people to commiseration and sympathy. They examined, without disrespectful curiosity, the body and the features of the face, which now, beyond having a definite shape like a stone, conveyed nothing to the mind. They inspected the room and took in the appearance of the things in it, and the colour of the wall-paper. The positions of the pieces of furniture and their look suggested the movements and postures of the owner. There was an ash-tray of blue china on a little table, and an opaque glass vase, with a flower embossed upon it, the stalk of which was a bluish-grey, swollen like a vein on a man's forehead.

Little by little the group reconstructed the soul of a retired railway servant. The whole group possessed the soul of an old engine-driver, seated near his window, knocking out his pipe in the blue ash-tray, contemplating the coloured calendar or the bunch of artificial roses thrust far down the neck of the opaque vase, or a frame he had finished gilding.

Although they were many and together, each one felt a sensation of solitude. They would have liked to have effaced themselves or made themselves small, so as to be in keeping with the size of the room.

They looked at the dead man again. He was hollow and empty. That inert frame was now as helpless as a cupboard or a chair.

The silence was broken, as if by spokesmen for the dead.

"His end was peaceful."

"His life was not unpleasant here. It's a bad business leaving it behind."

"How sad it is to die alone."

"He didn't go out much."

"He used to go to the cemetery on Sundays."

"Yes; he was a widower."

"He loved his wife. He missed her. He used to cry when he spoke of her."

"There is no one to weep for him."

The group resembled more and more the man who used to be alive under that ceiling and among those chairs and tables. The same thoughts awoke, the same words, certain syllables of which were even loitered over with his peculiar personal accent. But the group died a minute later.

The house was entirely changed. Only the day before the house as an entity did not exist at all. The families in it kept to themselves, grumbling at the proprietor for having provided

such thin partitions. Of an evening, when one family fell to talking round its table, and heard the murmur of its neighbour, the talk would break off and the family would begin to fume. "It's too bad. There's no privacy. One would think the walls were made of paper." Then it would go on talking less loudly.

On the staircase the people brushed by each other with a "Beg pardon," or a "Good-day," and sometimes they lowered their eyes to avoid thinking of the same thing. A spiral current of cold air murmured up it like the sound of the sea in an empty conch.

But now the house fermented. From Godard's body had escaped, with his last sigh, an energy of which the house had need.

People who met between the landings were careful to salute each other. It even happened that two women about to pass each other and going in opposite directions stopped, as though that which they had in common was too weighty to find expression in a mere gesture.

The two women spoke eye to eye, their voices slightly veiled, to show that what they had in common was intimate, secret, shut off from the world.

"So, you know? The poor old man . . ."

"You can't think how sorry I felt. He died quite alone."



"By himself! Like an animal!"

"Yes, like an animal."

"I don't call that passing away!"

"No, indeed. I call it rotting away!"

The inhabitants of the house enjoyed lingering in groups on the landings. They pounced upon this death with a joy they would not admit to. Little knots of them would pity Godard with much prolixity.

One housewife, issuing to shop, ran into another who was going out for the same purpose; a third was coming down the stairs, and they met.

"It gave me a shock when I heard it this morning!"

"Poor man! He died, no one knows how, in the night."

"Think of it! His parents are still alive."

"He must have been quite happy. He had a good pension."

"Do you know where his home was?"

"In the hills, I believe."

At the sound of voices other women came out. As their meals were cooking and they could spare only a minute or two to chat, they did not bring their keys, and so to prevent the draught shutting the doors behind them, they shot the bolts out; the rods of projecting steel tapped the door-cases at regular intervals.

While they talked of the old engine-driver, the wind from the street, rushing through

half-open entrances, met the wind in the courtyard, and then the doors opened wide and banged to again more violently.

The women saw within for a second the angle of a passage, the red-brick floor of a kitchen, a bed in a room with a bright wall-paper.

Each door kept making these interrupted revelations. The women on the landing learnt things about their neighbours they had not known before. So this one had a black wooden bed—the kitchen had no linoleum down—a crucifix and a sprig for sprinkling holy water hung on the wall. The life, the past, the efforts towards happiness, the ideal of each family thus escaped for the first time like perfumes beyond the threshold, and mingled on the staircase, because a man had died.

They caught sight of a man, soberly dressed, coming up the stairs.

The group whispered :

“ It’s the medical officer ! ”

The man passed, raising his hat. The women were silent for a minute. Their thoughts began to wander : “ After all, these things have their good side ; they bring well-dressed people into the house.” Then it occurred to them with some uneasiness that he must have thought the staircase dreadfully dirty. “ The porter will keep it so badly.”

Their silent reflections finished on a woman saying :

" But how untidy the stairs are ! "

The doctor came down again. His face had not changed its expression.

" You can't expect them to care. They are so used to it."

" They always come in at the last chapter."

Confronted with professional indifference, everybody felt an impulse to be more intense and to feel really more sorry, if only to show that the house cared about its dead, however little the rest of the world might care.

At this moment the group of women resembled the soul of a crowd in a church, simmering with confused emotion. Like such crowds it had a fleeting glimpse of things beyond earthly destiny and human power; like them it made a momentary effort to incarnate certain dreams of man; the state of being which feels itself universal and the life without end.

All the time they were talking, the women did not cease thinking about their shopping, and that they would have to go sooner or later; each had begun to feel that the conversation of the others was a little boring; but every one hesitated about going away; there was a bond between them not unlike a family tie; in order to find it pleasant to remain together they had no need to talk brightly or to find an excuse.

A fresh silence, and some one said quietly

(not to renew the conversation, but only to justify its length): "Poor man! It's not a natural way of dying."

At last they went their ways. And once outside, each felt more contented than usual, as though she had absorbed some force from the excited house and held it ready to discharge at random. They smiled as though conscious of a power within them.

When they stopped in front of a green-grocer's stall and picked up a bundle of vegetables, instead of looking at the muddy roots they turned towards the other women who were also buying, and thought: "In our flats a poor fellow died last night."

Towards evening, the house decided to contribute a wreath. The idea started on the second floor. Two little girls were entrusted with the list on which subscribers were to write their names. The children set out on their errand, knowing by heart the words they were going to repeat to the tenants. Each child held one corner of the smooth white sheet of paper, and walked quickly, taking care not to rumple or smutch it. On each threshold they looked at each other, took a deep breath, and, after staring at the door, wiped their feet noisily on the mat in the hope of making themselves heard without ringing the bell. It seemed a serious matter to make the bell sound, a bold, irrevocable step to take.



Inside these homes the lamps were lit ; in the kitchens the little lamps whose flames, like the blade of a pocket-knife, make only a small slit in the darkness ; in the sitting-rooms the big lamps, whose shades marked on table and ceiling a bright oasis among soft, indefinite shadows in which the spirit of family life seemed concentrated. The children were stooping over their copy-books before supper ; the father was reading the paper ; the mother was busy over the fire. The purring of the pot, the greedy little noise of the pens and the crackling of the newspaper—all these sounds suggested stability ; life did not flow here in a definite direction like water downhill ; it was stagnant, flat. The tic-tac of the clock alone ruffled its smooth, invisible surface.

At the rattle of the bell the pen stopped, the paper collapsed, the mother took the pot off the flames. The sound dropped into the family like a stone into a pool, making wider and fainter vibrations. Each felt his heart beat. So many different kinds of things may enter when a door opens : a friend, a letter, something unforeseen. The life of the family might be suddenly changed. While the mother walked to the door, the father became impatient : " Go on, open it." The school-boy broke off writing in the middle of his page, not knowing whether he

would have to go on working after the door had opened. The family prepared itself for the unknown, opened deep its soul to make room for the unknown.

“Hullo! It’s you, is it, my little dears?”

It was Jacques Godard who came in.

When the rounds were over the wreath had of course to be ordered at once. The evening was fine. Three women of the house, in wraps and slippers, went round to a shop near by. They had never before gone out together like that, those three, even to shop. And since they were together they preferred to leave their baskets, to forget commissions and preparations for dinner. Their walk began at that delicious hour when the wind in the streets seems to blow freshly from a distance, and the light of electric lamps sheds a soft green shimmer over the pavements. They walked abreast; at the first turning they fell into step. They felt as if they were young once more, and had not been married, but were schoolgirls dancing with a hop and a skip round in a ring together.

They thought about Jacques Godard, as girls think of a boy they know, ignorantly, curiously, and with tender mockery. He reappeared, masculine, yet with an unsubstantial body and of no particular age.

The women stopped. Suddenly Jacques

Godard became old ; took on again his white hairs, and became a fine old fellow, respected for his experience and his means. They hesitated outside a shop before a display of wreaths which the shopkeeper was preparing to take in. They, too, had grown old, in a minute ; they knew life, its pains and what one suffers waiting for death. Death no longer seemed to them, as to little girls, a country at the world's end.

They chose a wreath at twelve francs.

"We must have an inscription," they said.

"What inscription, ladies ?"

"I don't know. What do you think, sir ? You can tell us what is usual. It's a poor old man."

"Oh ! not so very old."

"No, but certainly not at all young. He died in the tenement yesterday . . ."

"Last night, you mean ?"

"Yes, last night, and he died like an animal, all alone, with no one to look after him. . . . You know, when one hasn't a family . . ."

"He was quite well off all the same. . . ."

"Yes, a little stingy !"

"And a bit of a bear !"

"Ladies !——"

"Everybody was very sorry."

"I recommend you——"

"It was my husband thought of getting up a subscription."

"He was comfortable enough. A driver of the Northern Railway, living on a pension."

"You ought to be told he didn't come from here."

"His parents are in Auvergne——"

"So, ladies, if I take you right, the wreath is given by the tenants?"

"Of course! It's the least one could do. Nobody knows their neighbours in tenements in Paris. But when any trouble comes——"

"You need only put in that case——"

"Naturally he knows nothing about it. When one's dead, one's dead. All the same . . ."

"Then it looks as if his father was coming. They've telegraphed for him."

"His father is a peasant."

"It will be a blow to him, at his age!"

"I felt it was a blow too. We live just underneath. We never heard him at all. He had a nice flat."

"I've seen it. It was nicely furnished."

"Well, ladies, it is usual to put in this sort of case: 'Offered by the tenants.'"

"The tenants, yes."

"People will think he was the landlord."

"Why not: 'To our neighbour'?"

"Madam, I have told you what it is usual to put. And now it's no concern of mine. It



is your business. I have told you what the custom is."

"Yes, he knows about it better than we do."

"Right, it's settled."

" 'Offered by the tenants.' "

### III

THE post office of the little town, where an old woman waited while things were being written out for her in a big book, was full of a kind of sour, chilly sunlight. The office, with its white walls, its deal fittings, its calendars in black and colours, was like all the other larger rooms in the village—the draper's shops, or the ground floors where women knitted—and, like all the others, it had an air of vegetative placidity that seemed impervious to any shock.

Yet its silence did not resemble any haphazard silence, but had a separate existence of its own ; it came away from the walls, just as, when the skin is dry, the flesh of an over-ripe fruit falls away. It was a silence which at any moment might open like a flower. It must have been swarming with tiny vibrations, which, too subtle to be heard, would now and then be stressed almost to the point of betraying their presence, and when the bell suddenly tinkled it was just as if this process had merely reached its climax. As the copper receiver began to chatter, the post office girl bent forward, and once more the vibrations scuttled back like ants into their heap.

"Do you know who this is—'Godard'?"

"Godard . . . Godard. . . . Yes."

"Not in the town, is it?"

"No. Why?"

"A telegram for Godard, without the extra payment. Can't be delivered."

"The Godards are not far off . . . not much over a mile."

"So they had a son?"

"Perhaps. Why?"

"Your son died to-day at his lodgings."

"Godard's boy is dead?" exclaimed the old woman who was waiting for her postal order.

"Seems like it. You know him?"

"Oh yes; I know him! It will kill them, poor old souls."

"Now I've got it. . . . They had a son in Paris, hadn't they? Several times letters have gone through here for someone called Godard—in Paris—Jean, I think?"

"No, Jacques."

"Jean or Jacques, he's dead."

"They don't say what of?"

"No, in a telegram, you know. . . . He was young, then?"

"Oh no; not much younger than myself."

"Really?"

"His father is very old. The son was on the railway."

"You're not from the same village as the old people?"

"No."

"Because then I might have asked you to take the telegram. They've sent it to us here, but it's not our business. The postman will take it to them in the morning. Well, can't be helped!"

"Couldn't we do something? It's the Easter holidays; there's a boy over there. Give him the telegram. He won't mind taking it up."

"Suppose he loses it?"

"No fear. Besides, just as well lose it as leave it to grow stale here till to-morrow."

"Boy, do you know Godard's, by the Oaks, up the lane to the right of the road?"

"Yes."

"Well, look here, child, a telegram has come for them, and the postman has gone and can't take it. It's important news; something dreadful has happened. They must be told about it at once. You understand, my dear? Their son is dead."

"Oh."

"Their son, who was on the railway. I will give you this blue paper, and you will take it to them. Look sharp about it, and don't lose it, and don't tear it."

"No."

"You're sure you know where they live?"

"Oh yes, ma'am; that's all right."

"Now look sharp about it. And as it's their son that's dead, you see, it will hurt them



much too much to break it to them all at once. So if you want to be very nice and kind——”

“ Yes, ma’am.”

“ Before you give them the blue paper, you might say to them in patois : ‘ Mr Godard, there’s some bad news for you.’ Then you might wait a bit . . . wait till they ask questions, and you had better put off giving them the blue paper as long as possible.”

“ Yes, ma’am.”

“ That’s right, you’re a good boy. Now what is it you are to say to them ? ”

“ ‘ Mr Godard, there’s some bad news for you.’ ”

The child swung round on one foot and was off, holding the telegram tightly in his fingers ; first he ran, then, as he got out of breath, he fell into a walk.

He followed the banks of the stream, making for the bridge which leads to the highroad. In all the village there was no more soothing spot ; time here seemed to fade meditatively into eternity. On one side of the stream there were walls going straight down to its bed, and where the walls had crumbled away a little the stones and pebbles of the bank formed a kind of delta that shelved toward the middle of the stream where the ripples were freshest. Here on this spot nobody had ever thought of the death of Jacques Godard.

The people who used to know him, the baker

at the corner of the street, the barber near the bridge, would say to themselves, when by chance they happened to think of him, " Jacques Godard, the old Godards' son, who lives in Paris, who was in the railway." That was their way of calling old friends to mind, on certain afternoons when, because there were no customers, they sat in front of their doors. And often as they had looked at the sun, the water, the valley, the walls opposite and the tree-tops peeping over the garden walls, the idea of a Jacques Godard lying stiff in his coffin or decaying under a tombstone had never entered their heads.

It was this little puffed and panting boy who brought that idea there for the first time. And he gave his whole heart to constructing it. He thought continually of the telegram which he was squeezing, all damp and crumpled, in his left hand, saying it over and over again to himself: " Godard's son died to-day," and quickly adding, " Mr Godard, there's some bad news for you."

That was all he knew about it. For him Jacques Godard was not an old pensioned-off workman, had never driven expresses for thousands of days, had never suffered, had never been married, had never lost his wife. Once again Jacques Godard became something quite simple, quite new and innocent of experiences—a child beside the stream.

It was nearly midday. For several minutes past the village had been existing more intensely. Stationary objects began to be united by movements ; herds of cows left the meadows, huddling together at the voices of their keepers, who hit them with sticks to keep them moving. Women came from the well ; peasants returned, bending under sacks. All along the roads, between the fields, from one house to another, living creatures were moving, strung out in lines—cattle, dogs, men—and through them all the spirit of life streamed, sometimes with a sprightly, sometimes with a sluggish, current. Through the bellies and the heavy heads of the cows it flowed obstructedly ; but the dogs helped it better on its way, and the hearts of the children sent it bounding forward again.

The village was no longer merely a collection of white lumps scattered here and there over the fertile earth. It was being linked together by a mesh of fine elastic nerves that throbbed beneath the strokes of the midday chimes.

It was at this moment that Jacques Godard reached the village where he was to begin his second life. That life opened with half-a-dozen words stammered by a little boy in a kitchen, in front of a table on which two dishes were smoking ; it expanded with a great cry, and, becoming a lamentation, turned upon itself like some twisting creature that

tries to bite itself to death. Then it went on its way, up across the yard and along the roads. The village had absorbed it quickly. At the stroke of noon a man went into the last house and before he sat down said :

" I say, Marianne, Godard's son in Paris is dead."

During dinner-time the village gave itself up to thinking about it. But people were only able to think of Godard as alive, and the only form in which they could recall him was a form that no longer existed. There were some who didn't know him, but most of them had seen him when he was young, when his hair was black and he still spoke patois. Soon they were thinking, not about Jacques any longer, but about his parents.

" Poor old people, what a grief it will be to them ! "

" They would have done better to have gone first."

" Especially as they say that he used to help them."

" He sent them twenty francs a month."

" That meant a lot to them."

" Let's hope they will make both ends meet now."

Then, the meal over, each family began to break up, and soon the village was almost a nonentity, and Jacques' existence was no more there in it than it was in his dead body in Paris.



"The diligence starts after sunset," the old man reflected. "It takes an hour and three quarters, so I shall still have time to get a bite before catching the train."

There was one road in the village that carried more traffic than any of the others, and this was the road he was walking along—a road favoured by the flocks at noon and twilight, an ingenious road with a gift for catching up houses and stretching between one threshold and another the chain of lives in motion. The life moving along it backwards and forwards warmed it into a certain friendliness that it never quite lost.

The old man wept no longer, but he made slow progress. He stumbled at the slightest obstacle; the impact of his foot against a stone made his whole body jerk to the right or left; he had lost the sense of balance. His limbs felt strange; or, rather, he felt he could not control them properly, as though virtue had gone out of him, withdrawn from his body by some external force.

He became aware that thinking about his son had the effect of making him still more clumsy, although he was not in the grip of one of those blinding despairs that make the loins stiffen and the legs melt like suet. Only, ever since he began thinking about Jacques, it was as if Jacques had ousted him from his own body, and, taking his place there, was not using it

properly, because he was not familiar enough with it.

His eyes were fascinated by trifles. Passing the crucifix at a little cross-roads, he gazed attentively at the wrought ironwork, with the block of rough-hewn stone and the mortar caked round the foot of the figure, and for the first time in his life it struck him how odd the crucifix looked standing out against a naked wall with a trickle of liquid manure oozing from underneath it. He examined the staircase of a farmhouse and surprised himself by saying :

"Not a bad house that ; they ought to be pretty comfortable."

Then he reached the point of asking himself : "Used I to think about my son before his death ?" Yes, he had often thought of Jacques, every day he had thought of him ; he had spoken of him to the old woman almost every time that they sat by the fire before dinner. Besides, Jacques' letters would have forced them to talk about him in any case. Had he thought about Jacques indeed ? Why, he had been thinking about him for sixty years. Only yesterday he had talked about Jacques at the top of the yard to old Arsène. And old Arsène, tapping the bowl of his pipe against a post, had exclaimed :

"Ah, your boy has done well for himself ! Better than if he had stopped here scraping the ground."

All the same he ought to have thought more about his son, or, rather, he ought to have thought about him in a different kind of way.

"Now I am thinking about him properly at last ; I used not to think about him like that. Perhaps the old woman did. Mothers are better at it. But I never thought about him as I ought to have done ; what proves it is that now that I do think about him it turns me queer."

He reproached himself with never having discovered before this particular way of recalling his son, and he realised that it was now too late to remedy his negligence. Henceforth whatever trouble he took, however fixed he kept his attention, filling himself with Jacques, and corking himself up as if he were a bottle, he would never add a jot to what remained to him of his dead son. He would never increase by a single drop the survival of the dead man in himself.

Ah, if he had only thought of this before ! As long as Jacques was alive in the body there had been time. He ought to have turned the time to advantage, talking about him, dreaming of him, breathing him in, working away at his presence, fattening the memory of him, like a beast one must take to market, on a given day, not a day later or the week after.

On his right a window shone, and in spite of his stupefied state the old man recognised

the house. Passing the green and blue reflections of the panes, he felt still more strongly that his son, his dead Jacques, was no longer anything more than a little isolated being, a wanderer, a stranger to all men's homes, moving slowly away into exile.

Then the road turned and sloped sharply. The last farm of the village had an orchard running down to the stream. The old man reached the wooden bridge, and, as there was a slight rise on the other bank, he stopped to lean over the parapet. He had passed by here thousands of times, but never before had his eyes taken things in so naïvely. The river ran under the arch of the bridge, and on till it was brought up by a dam, by which nearly all of it was captured, and then, tamed and calmed, it submitted to be drained away by a narrow channel, between stiff, parallel edges, until it reached a mill gate outside the boundaries of the village. The recent rains had made the water slightly turbid, and specks of earth were concealed in each drop of water, like the pips in an apple. The rain had nibbled at the soil of the village, and the stream kept carrying away something of the fields and meadows.

Contemplating these sights, the old man fell to imagining what perfect happiness would be like. To have one's own bit of land, well enclosed, and to live on it with one's family,



everyone snug between the old walls ; not to have a son far away, not to have anyone outside the circle, except the ancestors in the communal cemetery—in the old times life had been like that. The boys then used not to leave their fathers when they were twenty. Whoever then thought of the presence of the great towns, behind the mountains, on the edge of the sky? Now they were so near. They lurked in ambush so close behind the hills that sometimes one fancied one could hear the rumble of them, and make out their red glare against the background of the night.

In the old times there had been none of these telegraph poles which penetrate to the smallest villages, climbing the valleys, running between the pine-trees on the passes, and forcing the woodman as he swings his axe to remember that at the end of the wire a great town is commanding and waiting.

In those days people were less afraid of death, and those who survived the dead grieved for them otherwise. Of course they were missed ; it was sad not to see them or touch them any more. But it had been a clear-cut kind of sorrow, four-square and calm. What the dead used to carry away with them had been, after all, so little ; and all that was most precious in them, had not the survivors been able to keep that ? Everyone knew by heart their little ways, the last tiniest wrinkles

scratched by time on their cheeks, their ideas and their habits of speech, with the tones of their voices and their gestures. Their bodies indeed disappeared, and with them the habits which thoughts, gestures, voices had contracted during life; but these details the family would gather up and cherish, just as one takes in a neighbour who has been flooded out of his house.

But nowadays the sons of the family died "over there," after a life spent away from home, so that their parents scarcely knew them, and when memory recalled them it was always with the stature and the dress of children. Hardly anyone had any notion of what the years had really made them, and no one knew what they thought about in their exile. "For all I know my Jacques may have stopped believing in God, and perhaps he died like a heathen."

"And I don't believe I've even got a picture of him." Try as he would, the old man could not remember whether there was a photograph of Jacques on the wall beside the clock. "I must be going silly," he said to himself, "if I can't remember that," and to clear his mind a little he stopped thinking about it for a minute. Suddenly recollection sprang up sharp and clear. "Of course! And he's holding a switch in his hand. I am a fool." But when he tried to picture the features to

himself, his difficulties began again. "No, it's maddening, but I shall never be able to see him clearly; it's all a blur. I know exactly what his nose was like and his ears—his ears were big—and the way his moustache curled inwards a little; but I can't *see* him, and especially I can't make out his eyes."

His complaints took a new turn. "And I wonder what he died of. I should be floored if anyone asked me; that's a fact. We never thought of that when we heard he was dead. What did he die of? We never asked, we were struck all of a heap. And now we sha'n't know till I get to Paris, and that means that I've got to wait till to-morrow."

He felt as if the hours of waiting, hour piled upon hour, were a solid weight upon his chest preventing him from breathing freely. And then his grief began, as dead leaves do in autumn, to eddy round and round, turning about the centre of a single regret. The bitterest part of it all was that he hadn't been able to hold his son's hand in his last agony. He ought to have been there sitting by the bedside, watching and waiting for the last minute which finishes everything; for then, between the four walls of a room, and without one word spoken, something essential is communicated from the man who dies to the man who lives on. If there is no one to watch by the bed, something escapes from the room and

goes wandering abroad, fastening upon things like a mad dog. His whole being protested against this new burden coming upon him at his time of life. "Trouble, trouble, trouble! At my age! As if I hadn't had enough." Only yesterday Jacques had been no trouble at all; he could look after himself, and was responsible for his own life. And now the poor fellow had become like a baby again that needs a mother to do its living for it, while as for the rest of the world, there was no one to look to for help. What happened to Jacques was no concern of theirs. He had left behind him no wife; no children who might have felt in their blood the impulse to prolong his life. His only heirs were his parents, and they would soon be dead.

It almost irritated the old man to think how queer the people were who lived in towns, where they didn't like having children. He resented the inconvenience which this absurd habit was causing him. But then the whole thing was unnatural. "I ought to have died first, then he, and then his boys."

He shuffled along with his back bent and lifting his feet as little as possible, so as to save his strength. Yet he seldom stumbled against the stones on the road, because he was familiar with each one of them. There were some that he had been accustomed to see ever since he was a boy, still half buried like the worn



stumps of a cow's teeth. "Now I'm coming to Mount Riou," he said to himself, and, as the road sloped gently, a stone appeared on the right; it was little larger than a man's fist, but resembled Mount Riou just as a calf resembles its mother. And behind his back in the distance the old man felt Mount Riou itself, bulging on the horizon.

"What's becoming of my mind?" he said. "Good God, I'm thinking about stones, while Jacques is lying dead over there."

He lifted his head, and, seeing the straight road pointing to the village like a line drawn with a ruler, reflected, as though it were something astonishing, that the road would take him to the village, the diligence to the station, and the train to Paris. Everything was ready, just as if it had been foreseen long ago that one evening he would have to start on a journey to his son, and here were the means of transport fitting into one another, ready to sweep him along like a stream. He had nothing to do but let himself go and be pulled by the dead man.

## IV

IN the fourth-floor flat in Paris the atoms of the dead man's body were struggling against dissolution. After the last rattle of the death-agony they had experienced for a moment a sense of deliverance, but death, which had swallowed up the man, now set about eating away his flesh particle by particle.

On the second floor of the same house a woman jingling a bunch of keys in her right hand had come out of her room and knocked at her neighbour's door. "Don't you think," she had said, "that it would be a good idea for the tenants to club together and buy a little wreath for the old man who died this morning?"

While she spoke Jacques' father was walking along the road to the village. It was evening, and the light was gradually ebbing away from things into the west. During the day everything is clothed with a luminous glow so tightly fitting that there is no distinguishing between the thing and the garment; but now the light began to hang looser and remoter, like a veil which seems to heave with the breathing of the scene over which it is spread.

And the dead man's spirit, like a snail contracting the tips of its horns with a slow, sticky movement, until little by little it is all safely packed into its shell again, made an effort to draw back into the house in Paris. It had left the body, that flesh that had been its property for sixty years, and had seemed so inseparable from it, to the mercy of a multitude of unknown souls—thousands and thousands of alien souls which, as long as his body had been his own, Jacques had never guessed were lurking there, patient and submissive, only waiting their opportunity. And now he was abandoning his body to them without a struggle.

Just at that moment the old man was entering the village. It was lighting-up time, and through the curtained windows he had glimpses of families gathered round their lamps; for although in the daytime houses turn their eyes and their thoughts towards streets, at night it is streets that turn their eyes towards houses and their thoughts towards the light within. Stumbling a little in the darkness, he crossed the bridge—the same bridge the boy had run across in the morning with the telegram.

In Paris a woman was doing something to the wick of a lamp and saying: "So that's arranged, then; my little girl shall go round to the tenants with yours. Nobody will say 'No' to two little girls."

Passing on by the stream, the old man was glad to see that there was no light in the cobbler's window, because it saved him the trouble of wondering whether there was anyone inside, and he could go on his way without turning his head or being questioned by gossips. "After all," he said to himself, "they don't know about it yet ; the telegram was brought up at once." But in the baker's shop there were yellow shapes made by a large oil-lamp, and the shadow of the baker standing in his doorway fell across the road.

"Good-evening."

"Evening."

Then the old man began to cry. The tears welled up in him suddenly, though if the man had not spoken he would not have felt the need of them. As long as he was walking along by himself he could keep just happy enough, with that world-old pleasure one takes in merely living, to hold his new-born grief in check ; but when the man called out, "Good-evening," and he stopped before the open door, all his serenity fled and nothing but despair was left in his heart. He wept, and the baker, who was not at all an unkindly or malevolent man, felt a thrill of pleasure without knowing why ; he suddenly became very cheerful and very kind, and he would gladly have done any service for the old man who stood weeping before him.



In Paris two little girls were climbing the staircase, trying to keep step, and holding between them a fluttering sheet of white paper.

The old man turned to the left down a lane. It was now nearly night, and his hands moved forwards mechanically, as if to push away from his body a darkness that could be felt. At the top of the lane he was extraordinarily sad, but he had scarcely gone fifty paces when he felt almost relieved. He had ceased to dread being asked questions by passers-by, and even felt that it would be rather a disappointment if he were to reach the diligence without being noticed by anyone.

In Paris the two children stopped on one of the landings, breathed hard so as not to look excited, and rubbed their feet conscientiously on the mat. The hall porter was coming back from a stroll, and although when he had started out he hadn't given a thought to the dead man—"Why should I bother myself about the tenants?"—the spirit of Godard was stirring in him now, so that he conjured up a picture of the corpse and of Godard's father, and of the hearse which would soon be driving smartly up to the door and slowly away again, and of the carpeted doorway between the two shops, itself like a shop with dull black fittings.

On reaching the main street the old man saw that the diligence was not yet in its usual

place, and although he knew without asking that he would have to wait, he made for the office, hoping for an opportunity to tell his news. Nobody ever notices a poor rustic. He is never interesting to a number of persons at the same time, except perhaps at the three or four great moments of life—the night when he gets drunk and abuses the company, the day of his marriage, or the day when there is a death in his house. If he does not take advantage of these rare occasions he will never know the joy of being a centre of attention.

The little girls, glancing at each other like a pair of timid accomplices, rang the bell.

The old man stopped as he approached the office, and stood still. It suddenly struck him that to tell his news to anyone would be very painful. The best plan would be that somebody else should broach the subject, and then he would have nothing to do himself but nod his head and be sympathised with and cry. So, keeping away from the light of the office window, he halted irresolutely, lethargic and heavy as a man is who cannot make up his mind, while his dead son filled him and urged him on to speech.

The little girls, too, were primed with the dead man as they rang the bell. They listened to its sound spreading rings in the family peace on the other side of the door, like a pebble dropped into a pool. The porter, now crossing

the threshold of the hall, thought how wretched it must be to lose a son in one's old age.

Hesitating on the edge of the light that streamed from the office, the old man stood gazing at the ground like a cow not quite happy about the quality of its pasture.

Inside the dead body the energy which held the muscles together was snapping, fibre by fibre, its work done for ever; but Jacques himself, preceded by the sound of a bell, was penetrating into one family after another.

The distant rumble of the diligence was heard, nearing and taking the village by storm. The narrow street, as if bursting with the clatter, seemed to expand as it passed, and the walls of the houses, shrinking back in the darkness, were like lips that open to let escape a cry. At last it drew up before the office, and the steam rising from the horses' flanks was vaguely suggestive of the vapours exhaled by mountains after sunrise. Travellers hurried forward, raising their faces to the light; three women in dark dresses, two men, and a workman in a blouse. Godard was infected by their bustle, and, skirting the light as carefully as he could, he stepped into the office.

"Hullo, Mr Godard, you're only just in time to get a seat. To think of your starting off at this time of the night! Well, you're a sly dog; I suppose you're doing the same as M. Bichet yesterday—going off on the spree."

He half extended his arm and, eyeing the lamp, said :

"I'm going to Paris. My son Jacques is dead."

"Poor fellow ! Really ? Is he dead ? "

The old man felt sad, but less overwhelmingly so than before, when he was walking along the road, perhaps because he was looking at the lamp. The woman, who had been bored the whole evening, felt a sense of relief, like a breath of invigorating air that makes life worth living again.

"Dead, is he ? I had no idea he was ill."

"No, he wasn't."

"What did he die of then ? "

"I don't know."

He felt the tears rising, growing, bursting, as if the lamp were pulling them out of his eyes.

"So you're off to the funeral ?"

"That's it."

"He was on the railway, wasn't he ? "

"Yes."

"What about his wife ? "

"She's dead."

"Any children ? "

"No."

He paid his fare and turned back to the carriage. Once outside he could feel the office at his back, as a man leading a cart and horse feels the breath of the animal behind him. The little room was giving him back his son's



death touched with something of its own light and warmth, merely because someone in there knew what had happened.

The diligence stood in front of him, and soon there would be the train, with Paris at the other end. He could start now without the weight of his son bowing him down ; he had just shaken part of the burden off. Then he thought of the drawbacks of travelling by night : " I shall be sleepy and I sha'n't be able to sleep ; I shall have to sit up instead of lying down, and everything will be shaking."

But he realised that, once in the diligence, he would be closer to his son, and closer still with every turn of the wheels. He clambered in laboriously ; the step seemed to him very high. There was a place left on the right-hand side between two women. The row on the left consisted of a man, a woman, and the workman in the blouse. The other man was sitting beside the conductor. At first the old man didn't dare to sit down comfortably or to stretch his legs and lean back against the woodwork ; the last to get in, he waited for the group to grow accustomed to his presence. The others all stared at him for a minute, and he felt the forces from them intersect in him, like long needles in a piece of knitting. Little by little his right to be there increased ; time united him to the others, as by a kind of glue that gradually hardens. He ventured to shift

his seat and lean back. He was now really one of the group, steeped in it, and not merely imposed on it from without. They no longer stared at him ; he had run the gauntlet of all those eyes, and his soul was now like his companion's souls. He coughed. He knew nearly all his fellow-travellers. On his right was the woman who kept the draper's shop by the church, on his left the schoolmaster's wife, and opposite him, touching his knees, a rich old peasant woman who owned two farms by the stream. The man in the corner was the largest wine merchant in the town. The workman in the blouse near the door was the only strange face that he couldn't put a name to, but he looked like a cattle-dealer, and could easily be ignored. The two silent rows facing one another were like closed lips when the mouth is shut. The soul of this company oscillated between them, and, though it had no real centre, its meditations hung in equilibrium just above their heads, under the grooved wooden roof.

The group was unconscious of everything outside it. For one thing, it was night, and the village had ceased to exist either for eye or ear ; the increasing thickness of air was like a padding between them and the outside world, and their breath began to condense in little drops on the windows. Thus the group squeezed tightly together, enjoying the sense

of its own smallness and its likeness to a family.

Outside, the coachman came and lit the lamp on the left of his box ; it began to shine on the road, and the heads of the six travellers turned to look at it. All its light was projected forwards. True, a few of its rays came into the carriage, pricking the darkness like pins, but they only acted like a magnet on the mind, drawing it towards the tiny flame. The two rows of men and women strained towards the light as it moved away from them. They looked like a double line of rowers facing one way in a boat.

The group, no longer in a state of indifference and equilibrium, strained in the same direction as the light. Its volitions now had an object ; a strip of road, its surface glinting here and there, could be made out in front of the lamp. Everyone longed to see this lighted tract move forwards, and the yellow circle devour the road, and to feel the whole substance of the carriage shaking.

“ They seem in no hurry to start.”

“ That’s always the way.”

They waited, and everyone’s attention was fixed on trifles. One of the women listened to her heart beating. They said to themselves: “ While I’ve been sitting here I might have walked quite a long way.” The minutes as they passed grew big with something which

any slight movement would have caused to overflow. The man in the corner said: "I've had enough of this." The idea that it was incapable of self-propulsion, that it was dependent on the legs of the horses over which its will had no power, irritated the group. The man beat time on the floor with his heels.

At last the driver walked up, and was seen to gather the reins together and climb up the steps to his box. A shiver ran through the group. The men filled their chests as if to get rid of a weight. Time began to pass still more slowly. Everyone knew that the carriage would soon lurch forward, but exactly when was the question. The group was like a child watching the touch-paper of a firework splutter.

To break the spell, and to give the carriage a chance of starting unawares, one of the women began to speak.

"It would be much better to start before dark. I don't see why they shouldn't fix it an hour earlier."

The life of the group suddenly turned towards the woman who had spoken, but no one took it on himself to answer. There was a general feeling that it would be better to add a word or two, and that it was rather rude to let her utterance float unregarded like a feather to the floor, and for a minute everyone fumbled



for a phrase, but unsuccessfully. Godard, too, tried to invent a reply ; but how could he say anything before he had said that his son was dead ? An embarrassed silence set in. Heads were turned away, and each soul shrank into itself to avoid the titillations with which the silence swarmed. But now there came a bump, and the group smiled as it felt the carriage lurch forward.

All at once everyone felt easy ; regret at not having taken up the woman's words was forgotten, nor was she any longer surprised at not being answered. The group began to enjoy its own natural noise, and no longer felt isolated or crushed ; its noise enlarged its existence and protected it like cotton-wool.

The journey was begun, and the group was happy ; for this had been the sole object of its thoughts, nor was it capable of imagining any more exquisite delight. It had been created for this journey, for movement along the road. At rest in the village street, it suffered from its nature being unsatisfied, but now it exulted like a child that has just learnt to speak. It had no desire to get to the end of the journey, and was afraid of stopping on the way ; when the horses slowed down going uphill, and the noise subsided like the hum of water in a kettle taken off the fire, its heart sank and it felt the need of conversation.

“ A pretty heavy load for two horses.”

"Six of us, and one makes seven, and one makes eight."

"There's the luggage as well as us, you mustn't forget that."

"I think there's someone outside, too."

"Outside ? "

"Yes, the cowman from Malabrais. Just now, when we slowed down where the poplars began, he climbed on to the box. He must be sitting on a chair or a sack."

Heads turned smiling towards the grooved roof. The sudden knowledge that a man's weight was pressing on the boards, that someone was shivering up there among the packages, without anyone having known it, was amusing. For twenty minutes, while the group had been conscious of nothing but its own noise, a cowman had been thinking his thoughts up there. Then the idea became slightly tiresome. It was impossible to forget that he was up there, and to feel, as before, that there was nothing but the night air and the luggage bumping about. It was too far for the soul of the group to stretch up to him without feeling weak. The sensation of being gathered round a family table had disappeared, and the soul shivered like the flame of a lantern when its glass is broken. The group felt a longing to close in and to gather round some object.

Godard thought of his son more intently

than ever : " How I should enjoy it, if he were here ! We should go into the town together and we should talk, and even if we didn't talk I should feel he was there."

The whole group was waiting for an idea. The old man longed to tell his news, and was certain he would be eagerly listened to. The group was thirsty for it. Godard's spirit was no longer oppressed, diminished, and curtailed by the pressure of a hostile soul, but, on the contrary, was expanding, and the words were eager to issue from the old man's lips. But he could not think how to begin. The phrases he tried over in his head were too abrupt and bald. In spite of its desire to hear him, the group would feel a certain surprise and embarrassment were he to say all at once : " Do you know, my son Jacques is dead." There must be some way of setting about it less crudely, of throwing out a few trivial sentences to pave the way for his announcement. Yet that was scarcely decent ; when one has lost a son, one ought not to lead up to it by talking about the weather.

" If my wife were here instead of me," he said to himself, " she wouldn't be able to keep from crying, and then someone would ask her what the matter was, and everything would come out of its own accord."

He began to stare at the wine merchant huddled up in the corner. At first the man

was unconscious of his gaze, and went on examining the lamp as it flickered to and fro ; suddenly he moved his eyes, then his head, and turned towards Godard. The silence became active. The old man made an effort not to close his eyes and to charge his gaze with meanings.

" Aren't you afraid of overtiring yourself, at your age ? "

" Can't help that. "

" No ; I don't suppose you're travelling for fun at this time of night. "

" I should think not ! It's a bad business. "

The group was all ears.

" Not going to catch the train, are you ? "

" Yes ; my son is dead. "

" Your son dead ? "

" Your son in Paris ? "

" Your son Jacques ? "

" In the post office, wasn't he ? "

" Poor old man, how dreadful to lose a son at his age ! "

" Yes, indeed. "

" He was your only son ? "

" Yes. "

" He *was* in the post office, wasn't he ? "

" How old was he ? "

" Nearly sixty. "

" What did he die of ? "

" He was a postman, wasn't he, Mr Godard ? "



"No; an engine-driver."

Backs came away from the woodwork; everyone leant forward a little in spite of the jolting of the carriage; nobody felt tired or wanted to lean back. All these heads looked as if they were bending over something asleep in a cradle. The three women became very maternal, and thought about their children; but the wine merchant and the man in the blouse were shy of taking a share in the general sympathy, as if a misfortune of this kind were less peculiarly their concern. Thus all remained silent for several minutes, each one thinking about the dead man.

Then gradually the strain relaxed. The old man had stopped speaking and was questioned no longer. It became possible to cut loose from one another again; backs could relapse against the woodwork; heads could move arbitrarily, and any chance idea could be welcomed; one could smile at the shadows streaming by outside, without seeming to despise the old man's grief or to scatter callously the ashes of the dead. None of the passengers, men or women, forced their minds any longer to keep hold of Jacques Godard. They asked nothing better than to be distracted by other things, such as the lamp, and the beams it cast which seemed to swallow up the road, and the trees shivering as they passed. These objects suggested many reveries, which

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went the round of the company. But into them all the dead man crept. From the moment when no one felt it a duty to think about him, his image returned of its own accord, and was welcomed without embarrassment. It passed from one passenger to another, hanging for a little between a couple who could each of them perceive it vaguely behind his own ideas, just as one may see a child, too shy to come forward, hiding behind grown-up persons. Or it would mingle and dissolve in everything, only leaving in the mind a kind of brackish after-taste. Then suddenly it would condense again.

Thus at one moment the face of the old peasant woman, with its arched wrinkles, its look of resignation, and its shining eyes, became an incarnation of Jacques Godard; the next moment he appeared in the face of the woman who kept the shop, a face with tight red cheeks and little hazel eyes.

The old man, relieved, leant back against the woodwork and no longer felt afraid to stretch out his legs. But suddenly what he had just said struck him as wildly improbable. Was he really certain? Hadn't he simply made it all up? It was scarcely credible that Jacques should be dead. Such serious things aren't true just like that, all at once. In the morning, before the telegram, Jacques was alive. A telegram is not enough to change the world.

He began to argue with himself, and the jolting of the carriage kept shaking and breaking the train of his thought. "If I hadn't got the telegram, nothing would have happened this morning. I should still have a son, past work, in Paris. There was nothing to force me to know about it, if it hadn't been for the boy and the paper. To be sure, I hadn't see him for months and months. There was plenty of time for him to die. Who would have dreamed of it up there at home?"

And gradually he began to think of the telegram as a mere stroke of chance, quite unimportant, and with no cogency about it, like a dream which one can harbour or repulse at will.

Then he raised his head, which had fallen forward. Suddenly his son's death filled his eyes; the group was giving it out, like a vapour oozing from a hundred cracks. How was it possible to doubt something which all these people had no doubt about? Their glances of sympathy, the curve of their lips, the very cadence of their breathing, proved that it was all true. No, Jacques was no longer in his body in Paris; he was here, behind all these faces, but in a subtle, rarefied form, like a fragrance so faint that one cannot tell whether it is a fragrance or a memory. And the old man reproached himself for his arguments a minute ago. "How silly grief makes one! He's dead, sure enough."

As the carriage rolled on, with its light and its noise, the old man ceased to have a separate existence from his fellow-travellers. No one any longer remembered the past clearly ; the lapse of time seemed to leave no traces. Nothing had happened ; so why grieve and why regret ? Everything was moving and breaking up, ironwork, woodwork and human flesh ; the jolts and vibrations left nothing stationary, nor was there any longer any succession of events. Peace descended on the old man. He felt as if he was growing very young again, as if his being were scattering into its elements and had no duration, like the soul of a child.

No one spoke any more. The faces of the travellers were all of the same yellowish hue, and all lay back as if pressing on a kind of pillow of shadow. It was not merely that no one spoke. Not one of the women was thinking to herself : " Why doesn't that man want to talk any longer ? " The yellow faces, slightly swollen, did not look at one another like neighbours seeking to be recognised. All were silent, without artifice.

The cowman from Malabrais was whistling on the roof. He was quite alone, forgotten by everyone inside. He was cold, and the wind dividing as it met his body made his limbs shrink, and tore away or shrivelled up the emanations from his flesh ; it forced him in self-defence to become hard and impenetrable,



breasting the night like a cliff. The journey seemed to him endless. Sometimes he would try to count the trees, which, like the minutes, seemed sauntering leisurely by. Then he tried to make out the bends of the road ahead, and to guess whether they were far off. He would say, "I shall have time to count thirty," and would count, anxiously wondering if he had guessed correctly. The bend drew near. "Seventeen, eighteen. . . ." He would certainly never get to thirty. Then it was as if they stood still. "Twenty-nine, thirty, thirty-one." The bend rushed on ahead, almost as quickly as the carriage. Then, by dint of cracking the whip, it was caught up at last, and the cowman smiled to hear the grinding of the wheels.

They were approaching an inn in the valley where it was usual to stop to breathe the horses. Behind the inn ran the river, filling only part of its broad pebbly bed. There was a bridge across it, and tall poplars all round.

At this hour the inn was calm. With its unlighted front, with no travellers in its rooms and no horses in its stables, its existence was contracted into a corner of the ground floor underneath a large copper lamp, where the innkeeper's family were eating their evening meal. At the bar a man stood drinking and looking at the family. They formed a circle almost enclosing the table, but open towards

the man. Though seated opposite one another they did not look in each other's faces, nor was there any play of thought between them. Their eyes were fixed on their plates, or on the man standing at the bar. The man was speaking, and so was the family, but rather less. They were two entities almost intermingling, and the gentle stream of words that passed between them was not intended to draw them closer together, but just held them in a kind of loose embrace.

Then the words stopped. A new noise penetrated the room, the drawn-out rattle of wheels along the road. Everyone thought of the world outside, which the talk and the light had made them forget. The man and the family ceased to be two distinct creatures ; between them a purblind, sluggish spirit came into being and moved towards the door to meet the diligence as it stopped.

The cowman was the first to get down. He thought to himself : " They've been talking about all kinds of things inside ; one's never bored in company." He was jealous. Perhaps important matters, exciting events of which he knew nothing, had been broached inside the carriage. If they had got hold of any news, he would look like a fool. He withdrew into shadow and waited.

The inside of the carriage remained motionless, trying to preserve its life unchanged.

But it felt abashed. The noise and movement, in withdrawing from it, had left it high and dry ; it had lost its balance, and toppled sideways like a stranded hull. A miserable kind of existence ! It knew that a few yards away the inn was alive, dumb and lethargic like itself, but accustomed not to pine for movement. It lost its self-confidence and its shape ; the door opened, and the passengers got out.

“ Now we can stretch our legs a bit.”

“ Nothing’s so tiring as having to sit still.”

“ Especially when there’s so little room.”

“ The driver’s gone to have a drink ; let’s make the best of our time.”

“ What are we stopping for at all ? This stopping half-way is a great nuisance.”

The group scattered about the road in front of the inn. In itself this relaxation of its ties in the darkness would not have been unpleasant, if it hadn’t been slightly embarrassed by feeling its body hover between the carriage and the house. Each passenger felt ridiculous. The wine merchant, who was more affected by this sensation than any of the others, finally made up his mind to go into the inn. The cowman from Malabrais and old Godard were left close together ; they stood still for a moment, with nothing between them but a thin layer of night air. They did not dare to draw nearer together and to face each other, but each held his head

slightly averted, although they wanted to chat like friends.

"Is that you, M. Godard?"

"Oh, I didn't know you knew me."

"Everyone knows you."

"And where do you come from?"

"I look after the cows at Malabrais. But I'm not from this part of the country really."

"So you are cowman up at Malabrais?"

Their words came faster; their bodies had moved; the night no longer separated but enfolded them.

"What are you going into town for?"

"I'm going to see my people. I shall come back to-morrow night."

"Lucky fellow. I am going to Paris to my son's funeral."

The cowman, who had never seen the old man's son, formed a picture of a man still young, and dressed as people are in towns. The old man, soothed by these first words, was unwilling to seem too unhappy.

"He wasn't young, you know, on the contrary."

Then the cowman had a glimpse of a fat man with red face and dust-coloured hair.

"He was in a first-rate position, with his pension from the railway, and no expenses. Just going to take life easy. That's the way things happen."

The cowman glanced at the passengers



waiting in the road. He was pleased, and felt friendly to the old man.

"He has told me about his son," he said to himself, "he has told me, and not the others." But, after a moment's reflection, "I'm a fool," he went on. "Of course he told them while I was up there. There was heaps of time, and he's told them more about it, and they knew what to answer better than me."

"So you're going to Paris for the funeral."

"Yes."

"You'll catch the night train?"

"Yes; I shall get there to-morrow morning."

They strolled on to the bridge. The cowman leant over the parapet, and the old man leant up against it.

"The river's behind there, isn't it?"

"Yes, M. Godard."

"It's so dark that I can't see anything, can you?"

"Scarcely anything; but I can see a little."

"I see where there's a light over by the inn; it must be their lamp. But I can't see the bridge."

"I can see it. Look here, I can make out the coping, and then three trees—just there—two big ones and a small one; then the water and the stones."

"It's no good, I can't see anything at all."

They stopped talking. The cowman gazed into the darkness, straining his eyes to their

utmost ; he stood beside the old man without moving, bending towards him and touched by a vague pity. The night wrapped them round, and he was pleased to be seeing for them both. He gazed and gazed, conscientiously ; he didn't say what he saw, but he felt that, merely by seeing, he was imparting peace and assurance to the old man. And the old man, assuaged, closed his eyes and saw nothing.

A noise of footsteps and words was heard, the activity of something breaking up.

" They're coming out of the inn. It's time to start."

" Come on."

Godard and the cowman went back to the carriage. In front of the door the young man stopped and said : " Now I must leave you and get up there."

" Oh, don't bother to get up there ! There's room for a little one, if we squash up. It's cold at this time of night, and you'll be more comfortable inside."

The passengers, now in their places again, made no reply, but didn't look as if they objected strongly. Rather than push between these two rows where he wasn't welcome, the cowman would have preferred to go back to his roof and doze by himself among the packages, but unluckily the old man insisted, and shoved him aside. They sat down side by side and had scarcely settled into their places

when the carriage gave a lurch. Everyone was silent, and they didn't dare talk to one another. As if he could make his companion hear him, the cowman thought about Jacques' death ; and Godard, who also wanted to think about something for his neighbour's sake, but, because he was a stranger, didn't know what subject to select, kept his thoughts dwelling on their chat in the darkness.

The other passengers hastened to forget about Jacques. Sympathy with the father and emotion at the idea of his long journey came to an end, and they left the old man alone with the cowman whom he had taken it on himself to introduce. Heads were inclined backwards no more ; everyone sat up straight, with faces stiffened into watchfulness. The half-light had ceased to be pleasant, as had the purring of the wheels and the whole swarm of noises in which time had seemed abolished. All were impatient to reach the suburb and to rattle through the vivid refreshing glare of the lighted streets.

## V

THE old man made his way into the station and was at once swallowed up in its huge uneasy life. He was frightened of the crowd, which covered the platform in bunches, but was thin and straggling here and there with occasional isolated figures. His calm vanished, and he passed from group to group trying to find reasons for stopping somewhere. But where the groups were like solid lumps he was repulsed, and the straggling parts of the crowd infected him with their own anxiety, so that he ended by taking up a position between two placid-looking travellers, where he almost ceased to be afraid of missing the train.

Bells vibrated, and the crowd, deeply stirred, suffered a change. A thousand links snapped or strained ; the whole space swarmed with little moving forces, and was suddenly dotted with points, each of which formed the pivot of an eddy. Yet the general outlines were not altered. Godard could still see the two placid travellers beside him, with their bags on the ground against their legs ; and there were the straggling lines, bulging with luggage, and the lumpy groups, still the same, except that



they had shrunk a little. The noise of bells went on, like a frantic concentration of the passage of time.

The crowd thought more and more intensely of the train. It felt it coming, with another crowd inside it—a calm crowd, that had sucked its fill of speed and was sleeping like a well-fed baby. The old man was in torments, and to calm his fears kept looking at his neighbours. He no longer felt that the journey was arranging itself, stage by stage, from his cottage to his son's body, or that the means of transport were fitted together without any effort of his own and waiting to sweep him along like a stream. "Shall I ever get there?" he wondered. To make his way through so many obstacles to that distant room now seemed to him a painful and dangerous business. He was of no account in a world of things which had its own reasons for existing and had not been created for his convenience. The diligence, the station, the train, Paris, each had its own destiny, but he had to look out for himself and make the best of his chances; he might think himself lucky if he wasn't lost in the hurly-burly, like a tramp in a public square.

He ended by saying to himself: "It'll be a wonder if everything goes without a hitch." He felt cold, as if he had no clothes on, and was sorry he had started. Jacques seemed to him really in another world.

He heard shouts. A movement took place in the heart of the crowd which increased his discomfort, so that he failed to see two bright lights which came gliding along the rails, suddenly giving the night a visible form. Yet the train penetrated his soul as quickly as everyone else's.

Then the crowd lost its head. The attraction of the carriages tore it up from the ground, gulped the groups down, and dissolved the straggling rows into a hurtling rush of people running after the train, clutching at handles and pouring into openings.

When the train started Godard found himself in a corner seat, surprised that it had been so easy. He felt himself all over ; ticket, purse and handkerchief were safe ; and having made sure that he had lost nothing, he gave himself up to a kind of happiness. The compartment seemed to him almost exactly like the inside of the diligence. There were seven people, sitting as before ; but the light came from the roof, and, above all, the direction of their movement was different, no longer sideways. Instead of being dragged by one end like a log, the group was propelled along its whole breadth, and the old man felt as if something was pushing him from behind. Then, again, the compartment was not a lonely fragment travelling through the night ; it was one of a hurrying string of duplicates, like a flock of

cattle. The whole train was present to the passengers as they dozed ; it quivered under their feet ; its pulsations shook the boards and passed into their limbs, taking possession of their legs, running through their veins, and mingling with the beating of their hearts. And everyone's volitions reached right up to the engine.

The old man said to himself : " Jacques is dead." But he felt no desire to tell the rest of the carriage. " And Jacques drove trains, hundreds and thousands of trains." He had an image of Jacques erect on an engine, his eyes bent forward, his fingers on a lever that glinted in the light of the furnace. He felt as if his son were pulling him along with a swift, regular motion. They were going straight towards him ; his was the will-power which made all these carriages roll on, with his father inside ; his the form erect on the engine, with eyes turned towards the darkness, with his hand clutching a little metal wheel and lit up by the glowing coals. He was not dead, he was more than alive ; along the whole length of the train his new life was beating, and its pulsations were stronger than all the hearts within.

In Paris the three women were coming back from the wreath-maker's, walking abreast and chattering. They began by talking of their purchase.

"It's a lovely wreath, you know."

"Not bad for the price."

"A pretty stiff price, too!"

"We shouldn't have done better anywhere else."

"It's rather big, but it's distinguished."

"And the inscription will look well."

"When was it to be delivered?"

"First thing to-morrow morning."

"Let's hope it won't be late."

"He promised it would come in plenty of time."

"What time is the funeral?"

"Twelve o'clock, I think."

"Are any relations coming?"

"I don't know."

"I fancy someone is coming. At any rate the porter sent a telegram this morning."

"Did he have anyone belonging to him?"

"Yes; a father and mother."

"Of course; I am a fool! I've been told that twenty times."

"But they live ever so far away, don't they?"

"Yes; in the south."

"They must be pretty old, too. At their age they won't bother to come. Just think, what a journey!"

At first Godard found his seat comfortable.  
"This is better than the diligence," he said to



himself ; " there's more room and it isn't so hard." But he soon grew tired of sitting in the same position, and moved to dispel an incipient stiffness. " To think that I've got to stop here for twelve hours ! " The idea terrified him. " And when I get out at the terminus, it will begin all over again ! I shall have to look for the street and the number." Paris seemed to him very far away, and his son had sunk below the horizon. To quiet his impatience he thought of the nights he had spent in the barn waiting for a cow to calf ; the dawn used to come at last, but it would never do to look out for it like a lucky chance. He determined to go to sleep, and hunched himself up into his corner.

The three women looked in on the porter to tell him about the wreath they had bought. He listened without enthusiasm. This whole business of the subscription and the wreath bored him ; in principle he was forced to approve of the steps taken by the tenants, but he hadn't been sufficiently brought into the affair himself ; lists, subscription and purchase, everything had been done without his help. " I am nobody here," he said to himself. " They have no use for me except to sweep out the hall." And the way they had gone to work was particularly annoying, because the death was really more his property than anyone else's. " I was the first to

discover it ; I opened the door ; I went into the room ; I almost saw him die, and it was I that told the others. If it hadn't been for me, they would know nothing about it now. I told the family too ; I sent a telegram." He was filled with the bitterness of the man who has been done out of something which he watches others enjoying.

The women stopped on the first floor, where one of them lived. They spoke in low tones, partly not to disturb the neighbours, but chiefly to increase the feeling that there was a bond between them. A clock struck ; the sounds passed through their souls and came out different on the other side. The woman who lived on the first floor said good-bye to her companions, who passed slowly on up the stairs and stopped on the next landing. They could think of nothing more to say, and they wanted to stop talking, but were afraid to part. Both were thinking simultaneously of death, of the inconceivable thing that it is to die, and they hankered after anything that seemed the negation of death, as if they kept it at arm's length as long as they remained side by side. They fancied that in separating they would be giving in to the forces of the night. A puff of cold came up the cage of the staircase, and it was as if the whole house centred round some force from outside.

They leant against the banisters and looked

at each other with softened, frightened eyes. They would have liked to have been daughters of the same father, and to have gone in at the same door, or, on the dark landing touched with the chill of death, to have thrown their arms round one another. Three times they said, "I really must go," and went on looking at one another. One of them murmured, "My goodness!" They kept their minds on the passage of time, as if listening to its flight; they counted the minutes without meaning to. At last they said good-bye, shook hands, and moved each towards her door.

Huddling into his corner, the old man kept his eyes shut and tried to sleep, ineffectually at first. His thoughts remained stationary or kept marching past as before, and he was still in the railway carriage; he could see it as clearly as if his eyes had been open, with all its occupants, each quite distinct. Then the memory of the road at home passed across his mind, appeared again, and rose up several times unsummoned; not the whole road, but the corner by the crucifix with the splashes of mortar; and the crucifix grew and grew until the road disappeared and all round it a chapel rose. Then it turned into a market-place filled with seated peasant women and run-away cows lolloping about, in front of a company of soldiers beating drums. The railway carriage melted away beneath the pressure of

the old man's visions ; it still surrounded him, but at a distance, and as a loose and torn integument.

Over there, in Paris, the house was suffering the night to stab deeper and deeper into its heart, and slowly was giving over its inmates to sleep. In a room on the fifth floor was an old lady who had gone to bed immediately after supper ; she had been asleep since nine o'clock. As always happened with her, a thick fog, surging with shapeless dreams, gradually extinguished her consciousness ; but they were not real dreams ; her soul, instead of soaring, wallowed like a drunkard in the mud. A few minutes later a little girl on the second floor fell asleep, and was at once seized and whirled away by a throng of visions. Then another little girl fell asleep, and then on the first floor one of the women who had bought the wreath. Into the attics sleep crept, and into the family of a bank clerk on the third floor. Souls were peeling off one by one their wrappings of the day. Sleep overcame the butcher's children, and a girl who lived alone. Eyes closed, ears became deaf, human consciousness of things ceased. A boy on the first floor fell asleep. A woman on the second floor fell asleep. Then sleep had hold of the whole floor ; the three families moved away from their lamps and then put them out.

The butcher turned out the last gas-jet in



his shop and went into his room, passing through the room where his children were asleep. He looked at them, and breathed in their slumber for a moment ; it gave him a sudden desire, in which disgust and sadness were strangely mingled, to go to bed. On the fourth floor a woman got into bed with the intention of thinking about nothing, but could not forget the body rotting on the other side of the wall. First she imagined Jacques Godard in his room, as when he had been found dead in the morning ; once more she saw the little group which had gathered agitatedly round the dead man, and which had been so like him, and this recollection was not particularly painful. But presently the idea of the body lying inert and livid in its coffin took possession of her ; she thought of discharges, of internal fermentations, of sickly effervescences, and, worst horror of all, of the flesh that falls away. She buried her face in the pillow and tried to think of the lightest, brightest things she could remember—afternoons soaked in sunshine, quiet hours in woods, or country inns embowered in honeysuckle. When she fell asleep, Jacques Godard appeared to her, lying rigid, his lips caked with an umber foam.

On the third floor a young man was seated alone by a lamp, while his family were scattering for the night. He had made up his mind

to write a long letter to the woman he loved, and to put into it all the emotion with which one broods at night over an absent dear one. He felt the relaxation of the house, and its sleepiness like a sticky film. He gazed at the paper, the inkpot, the lamp, and turned words over in his head without daring to make a choice. Now and then he felt proud of not being asleep, and would say so himself, "I am going to stay up." He seemed to himself bigger and deeper than before, and his soul, like a frail rod, swayed beneath the strong emotion of the night. But his eyelids began to twitch; he sank gently into the torpor of the house; his bed seemed to him a distant and incomparable blessing. At first he struggled, gazing at the white paper, wrinkling his forehead resolutely, and pulling his moustache. He tried to hold his soul together; he penned it in and herded it like a flock of sheep. But, do what he would, it split up; he would grasp at an idea and hold it tight for fear of a stampede, but suddenly it would lose its shape, melt into visions and be turned to a grimacing rout. Something within him whispered: "This is no time for letter-writing. Everyone has gone to bed. It isn't as if the sun wouldn't rise to-morrow."

He yawned, closed his eyes, and then opened them violently, angry at having dozed for a moment and yet certain that he would

doze again. He thought of his bed as of a precious reward which he had not earned. Three nerveless lines sprawled across his paper. Then he gave it up. "Can't be helped ! I will finish it to-morrow. It's a pity ; I had plenty of ideas. Anywhere else, I'm never sleepy and can sit up for five hours without feeling anything, but here it's too much for me."

The old man was sleeping in the corner of the railway carriage. He had not forgotten the other passengers, but his past was shimmering round him, and slowly the image of his son appeared. Jacques was neither alive nor dead, nor even clearly distinguishable from his father ; the two between them formed a single confused and sleepy being, racked by the violent motion of the train.

The woman on the fourth floor began by sleeping dreamlessly ; her soul was like a close dark room. Then one by one, in this violet twilight, candles were lit which struck reflections from a deal coffin resting upon trestles. And Jacques appeared, all bent, and draped in some dark stuff ; he moved round the coffin, stopping now and then to examine it closely. Suddenly, with one puff, he blew out all the candles. The woman woke up terrified, found her eyes wide open, and saw that there was nothing there but darkness.

On the second floor a little girl lay asleep

with a smile on her face. Her blanket was clasped in her left hand, and it seemed to her that she was carrying a big sheet of paper round to the tenants ; she held it tight, but did not dare to press it against her body for fear of crumpling it.

About eleven o'clock the butcher dreamed that he was standing in front of his door talking, and that Jacques Godard was with him ; they spoke of the weather, of business, and of various occupations. Then, without anything having altered, Jacques Godard said, "I am dead" ; the butcher felt no surprise, and they went on with their conversation.

In the next room a man and a woman were embracing, clothed only by the warmth of the bed. Languidly they waited for the revival of desire, the woman's hands moving slowly over the man's chest and back. She was happy but not satisfied ; she loved and respected this body so much stronger than her own, but she let her mind dwell on other caresses and called up pictures of other men, trying to imagine what it would feel like to be in their arms. "It must be odd to be caressed by someone very tall, or by an old man."

Then she remembered that an old man was lying dead in the house ; she saw Godard and shivered. The man was thinking how glorious it was to be young, and gradually



the image of Godard rose up in him. Hatred of old age and death made him clench his teeth, and suddenly remembering the young body that lay beside him, he seized it again.

At the same moment the woman on the fifth floor, who never dreamed, was disturbed by a faintly luminous mist, like a blur on the night trying to assume a shape. She was so astonished that she thought she must be awake. She tried to get rid of this turbid damp glow, and blew upon the mist, which parted and melted ; a cross appeared, a grave, and the corner of a cemetery ; then mist again ; then a dead man standing erect ; then mist again, and then nothing.

Jacques Godard passed into the dreams of the young man asleep on the third floor. He rose from a staircase, stood still, and poured out a stream of words, tapping on the ground with his stick. Some danger hung over him, and all unconscious of it he went on talking, with benevolent gesticulations and a smile so kind that it was impossible not to like him. The young man wanted to warn him, but couldn't even open his mouth, so he began to gesticulate too in the hope of making him understand. But it was no good ; the old man only went on smiling.

A woman on the first floor fell asleep thinking of the wreath. Soon she saw the two

women who lived on the floor above coming up to her all out of breath. They all took arms and ran off, leaping over steps and stones and wooden bars, jumping higher and higher every moment. Suddenly they fell : the earth opened, and they began to slide smoothly down, down into lurid darkness, and their long-drawn-out fall was somehow the same thing as the death of Jacques Godard.

A little girl dreamed that an old man caught her by the hand and made her walk beside him at a pace that tired her dreadfully. The old man said : " I walk fast, though *I'm* not in a hurry ; but you are in a hurry. You will be late for school." Suddenly the schoolmistress appeared ; the little girl began to make excuses for having loitered, and unfolded a huge sheet of paper scribbled over with thousands of signatures.

In his corner of the railway carriage Godard dreamed that he was sitting at a table opposite his son. Beside them stood an engine, puffing but motionless, with a train full of people. He and his son were eating, and the tablecloth was covered with blue flowers ; they swallowed their food as quickly as they could, and Jacques didn't stop to talk, but kept pointing with his fork at the engine and the train. " Quite right," his father thought, " they're waiting for us ; we must be quick." They were unwilling to get up before they had finished all

the food, but more and more food kept coming, which they were forced to gulp down. In his anxiety Jacques waved his fork again, and pointed at the engine.

On the second floor a woman's dreams were full of the solemn hush of a funeral ; she was walking in front, while men with grave, sympathetic faces saluted her from a distance. She carried a beautiful wreath that bumped against her knees at every step. Her soul was full of joy and vague gratitude for the glory that surrounded her.

Jacques Godard no longer sat opposite his father, close to the engine. The platform swallowed up the table, and fields of corn waved where the train had been. And now Jacques diffused himself through the dark house. He urged on the woman with the wreath, warming her heart and surrounding her with a crowd of sympathisers. He made a little panting girl run beside him. Especially did his spirit oscillate between the third and the fourth floors ; sometimes the glow from it entered several souls at once, like a connecting ring passing through them and sojourning in them. There were several minutes during which all the people who had met in the morning between the walls of the dead man's room were stirred, as they slept, by impulses so closely akin that they almost overlapped.

In the railway carriage Jacques continued

to haunt his father ; he clung to the sides of the train as a flame clings to a blazing log, flinging a broadening light over the dark moving mass. In the house he went up and down, darted sideways, and rotated on an axis. Its slumbers heaved uneasily with his heaving, and he filled all its six storeys with tempestuous pulsations.

But the flesh began to decay ; tiny organisms burrowed into it and swam in the confusion of its juices. The dead body was crumbling into innumerable lives.

Godard opened his eyes ; day was breaking, and still the railway carriage was there. Another passenger had got in. The same noise was going on as the night before, and everyone was vibrating to the same kind of jolts. The air blew cold through the open window, turning the heart sick. Faces looked at faces with no mutual recognition ; they seemed to draw near to one another from far away, and their eyes to be making active efforts to see. Then everyone felt embarrassed and unable to look at his neighbour. When one of the men got up and leant out of the window the old man felt confused, as if he were in the presence of a magistrate. He stopped leaning back against the partition, took his hat in his hands, turned it over and over, and peeped out of the window where the body of the



leaning passenger left a corner unobstructed. Another man rose from his seat, turned over the parcels sleeping in the rack, and took down a little bag, which he put beside him on the cushions. A woman took off her hat, snatched the combs out of her head, pulled out some pins and put them between her lips for a moment, patted and smoothed her hair and adjusted certain coils, then put back pins, combs, hat, and leant back again. Another man took a black brush out of a basket and made it scamper over his clothes with little squeaks like an insect. The old man watched these movements, respecting them, but only half understanding, because he felt no desire to perform them himself. But he no longer felt easy, and his disquiet began to take on a certain resemblance to the agitation of the compartment.

The air entered in separate puffs, and each body began to be surrounded by a light which isolated it from all the others. The train was running through little stations, which altered its noise as it passed, and short tunnels which excited it to an intenser life. The old man would have liked to rise, to handle parcels and make ready to do something ; but he could not move without a motive, and he had no packages to seize and no fine clothes to brush. The activity of the others ended by making him feel almost impatient ; he wanted to see

them all sitting down again ; then he would have shrunk back into his own corner and, shutting his eyes, have dozed a little. He tried to forget them, all the same, and to go to sleep again. For several minutes his body remained motionless and full of shadow, and he thought that the dreams of the night were going to come back. But he seemed to be sleeping in a public market-place in front of all the people and all the cattle, and the night which his lowered lids made for him was not thick enough to prevent several forces from penetrating. He tried to keep his uneasiness under, refusing to open his eyes, and pulling the shadows up from the depths of his being as from a well. But he felt that he was being looked at by the shining eyes opposite. At last he opened his eyes ; no one was staring at him ; all their faces were turned towards the doors. Then the old man felt no more need of sleep. He even was sorry that he had let so many things go by unseen, and, leaning forward slowly so as not to hurt his stiff back, he tried to make out through the window what sort of force was dominating the carriage.

It was as if they were inside something. Trees, fields, houses, all tended in a definite direction ; at each fresh telegraph-pole the country round seemed to spring into being, and what was caught up was not in the least like what was passed. There could be no doubt

about it ; even the children were certain that the train was arriving and not going away.

Looking out of the window the old man felt little surprise. He did not identify these shapes with any certainty, and was diffident about saying to himself, " That's a house, that's a chimney, that's a farm," but what he felt was not so much astonishment as timidity. Although he was embarrassed, and sometimes wanted to leave the glass and shrink back into his corner, he did not feel completely alien to those solid moving shapes ; he was not contemplating them externally, but was absorbing their being into his own. Still, he had only a very vague idea of what was meant by certain sheds that he saw, and those long rows of roofs with huge pipes. Suddenly a huddle of red-tiled houses appeared, each with its weathercock and its little garden. In his own market-town he had seen something much the same—the same neatly painted roofs, the same weathercocks, the same masses of leafage enclosed by walls, in the well-to-do quarter behind the Carmelite church. But he didn't venture to decide that they were really the same ; he distrusted his memory and would not believe the mere report of his eyes.

Then he became sad. A gloomy irritation seemed to settle over all that moved behind the glass. Turning his head away he looked round

the inside of the carriage, and felt full of shame in the presence of these men and women ; he thought they were despising him, that his grief would find no sympathy if he were to speak of it, and, as if to hide himself, he put his forehead against the window again. The train was under the influence of a great suburb. Chimneys towered like curses. He grew more and more miserable ; the train, the diligence, the road from his village, it was all like the gradual unfolding of a catastrophe, and he felt sick with desire to have done with it, and with terror of going any farther.

The old man lifted his head and looked at a house on the other side of the street, which he had just been told was the house he wanted. His grief started up afresh, like a dog that sniffs dinner, and his hands shook a little. He gazed at the front of the house with motionless eyes, straining towards the windows with a stare so intense as to hurt him. " Jacques ! " Impossible for him to understand the house ; it seemed to him more extraordinary and more inhumanly hostile than all the houses he had seen since he left the station. It was not so much the idea that someone had died in there that was surprising, but he could form no image of the kind of life that people led there before they died. Each row of windows saddened him. Every detail of the house



marked the separation of human beings into definite hard-and-fast compartments, as incapable of overlapping as the severely just divisions of a graveyard. He dropped his first tear. He told himself that his dead son was there and nowhere else, and it seemed to him miraculous that he had succeeded in reaching him at last. "Jacques is in there, in his coffin, or perhaps still on his bed, or perhaps lying on the floor in the same position as he died in." He tried to see Jacques, but memories crowded upon him too thick and fast, and the clearest image he could form was the figure of a sturdy boy, with his hair combed out, sitting astride on the pole of a waggon. His tears flowed faster. The street seemed broader and the house farther away. Jacques stole out of the house towards his father. The old man became the cause of movements in various people. A young girl stood still behind him, taking great care not to disturb him. A woman in a shop was reminded of her father who watched sheep in the hills ; her hands and feet tingled and her cheeks felt cold, just as if her father were dead, and her heart went out to this old man who was looking up at a house and weeping. The butcher said to himself : "Hullo, that must be the father of the fellow who died on the fourth floor." The old peasant, full as he was of his dead son, and stiff with the stiffness of the corpse itself, did not

stir. All round his rustic figure the life of the street relaxed and softened, melting as it grew colder, as snow does round a lump of salt.

Then an errand-boy laughed, and the old man moved. He crossed the street without looking to right or left, crossed the pavement, entered the hall, and felt still more wretched. He longed to weep endlessly, to utter groan on groan, each exactly like the last, to shake his head and sob rhythmically, with the obstinate misery of an animal. He had lost all desire to think about his son, and could have moaned interminably, without any consciousness of the cause of his grief. Once inside the house, he felt that it was not worth while to think about Jacques' death any more, to try to see his eyes again, to recall his different expressions or the sound of his voice, or to share the agony of his death. There was nothing left for him but to weep, and to send his lamentations twisting up the staircase like a flame drawn towards the air. The house itself asked nothing better. A shepherd feels less responsible in a warm stable than on the open hillside with his flock.

The porter came out of his lodge. "Ah, is that you, M. Godard? Got my telegram? I'm afraid you've had a long journey. I hope you're not very tired. Sit down a minute before we go upstairs."

The porter smiled genially, with a kind of cheerful friendliness. He forgot his grievances

against the tenants, and no longer minded having a death in the house. He liked being sympathetic, and did not need to hunt for words or to simulate grief. Tears almost came into his eyes at the sight of this gnarled old man who had come all the way from the mountains in a new blouse.

"Won't you have a glass of something? I've a drop of the right stuff. One must look at it reasonably; sooner or later we've all got to go the same way. It was a beautiful death; I only hope I shall be let off as easy when my turn comes. But it would have been a comfort to him if he could have seen you—and to you too, of course. There's nothing so wretched as dying away from one's family. Everyone in the house has been very nice about it, and I've seen to everything, as you'll see. The doctor has been, and the death has been registered. . . . 'Burial permit'—nothing more to bother about. You've just come in time; a little longer and you'd have been late for the fair."

The old man lifted his head and gazed at the porter, who went on: "I was the first to find out he was dead. Yes, I closed his eyes."

Godard sobbed, and lowered his head again to weep. The porter looked at him, and, without saying any more, thought to himself: "It's all very queer. Here comes a fellow from goodness knows where; and there will

be more of them. People I don't know, and who will never set foot here again. Turning the premises upside down ! ”

The atmosphere of the room, heavy and brittle as sand, hurt the head with its weight, but was peculiarly well fitted to soak up the overflow of a soul in pain. The mirror on the cupboard and the mirror on the wall prevented the room from having boundaries. The porter felt his pleasure vanish with disquieting rapidity, though he would have expected it to last as long as the presence of the old man, and to be more solid. Then he felt a desire to move.

“ Let's go up. I will lead the way.”

As he shut the door of his lodge he looked round the hall in the hope of seeing someone. The appearance of a man or a woman, particularly of a woman, would have changed the whole spirit of the place. For the porter, pleasure would have returned, and the old man's heart would have beat faster with the emotional lift and surge of tears.

But they saw nobody. They started up the staircase, as if to go to the dead man. Then, “ What's this I'm doing ? ” the porter said to himself. “ There is no point in this poor old man's being brought face to face with the body. I am a fool.”

They went down again. To avoid the lodge, where they would have been alone once more,



with the mirrors and the silence and that atmosphere which soaked up the pleasure of the one and the pain of the other, they went along the hall and into the butcher's shop. The shop was empty, except for a boy sweeping up bloody slime.

"Your master not in?"

"No; he's at the slaughter-house. Any message for him?"

"It doesn't matter. It was only about this gentleman, who is the father of the dead man up there. We might have talked over arrangements. But never mind! The funeral won't be till to-morrow."

"I'll tell him you called. But why not have the funeral to-day? Isn't there time?"

"Plenty of time; notice has been given, and we've only got to send word; but to-morrow will be better. I wrote to the club he belonged to. I knew which it was because I always looked at the notices before taking them up to him."

The dead man's room, less light than on ordinary days, was filled with a sombre group, ranged one deep round the walls and the wooden bed. Their eyes met in a central point that could almost be seen. All, men and women alike, made efforts not to move, and were silent except for a word now and then about some detail of the ceremony. They

were not thinking about their own affairs, nor yet about Jacques Godard.

Their thoughts were absorbed in an effort to be serious and profound. They wanted not to see the shape of the trifling objects round them or the play of sunlight on the panes, and the slightest noise, a door opening on the floor below, was a disturbance. Any occurrence whatever seemed slightly wicked. Fed by unaccustomed forces, their souls grew from minute to minute.

The group became conscious of new powers; it was beginning to take for granted its enlarged contact with things of which it had had no suspicion a moment before. The crust of everyday appearances opened before it, exposing the underside, as if a lid had been lifted, and, instead of being surprised, everyone felt merely as if he had taken up an old habit again. Ordinary life, the kind of things one thinks about in the morning or at breakfast with one's family, seemed insipid and childish.

Still there were little gusts of distraction, relaxations pleasant by contrast but annoying if they lasted too long. One middle-aged man was vexed because he couldn't stop thinking about a five-franc piece which he had lost the day before. "Perhaps I've only mislaid it. I ought to have looked for it this morning before coming, so as not to have had it on my mind." He would have liked to forget it. "What's

the good of thinking about it ? ” It would have been so delightful to sink into a kind of brown study, pervaded by death, but untroubled by death’s sting.

The women were less sensitive to the room’s soothing influence. Though more than one mystery was miraculously made plain there, they would have preferred to weep. There is pleasure in brushing with one’s fingers the very pulse of life, but it is a tame pleasure ; and to follow the dead on their wanderings, is, of the many ways of loving them, one of the most discreet. The women needed a church, with incense and music, where they would have shed tears. They would have summoned the dead with cries and brought him back into their midst.

The coffin had been laid upon trestles, with candles and black trappings round it. The door of the house became a forbidden abyss. Blocked by a darkness that bristled with tiny lights, it had ceased to be a means of ingress and egress.

A few passers-by hung about already, and some of the neighbours left their shops and rooms. In front of the door with its hangings the intervals between the onlookers diminished. The coffin made the life of the street congeal.

“ What’s happening ? Do you know ? ”

“ It’s a funeral.”

“ Yes, I know, but whose ? ”

" You ask the body, he'll tell you."

Thus the crowd grew, without feeling any uneasiness. It scarcely even wanted to know the dead man's name, nor was it on the lookout for the unexpected, for any of those exciting events that act like brandy on the heart. Knowing beforehand what was going to happen, it waited for it none the less patiently. People who had stopped did not move on, for they were not afraid of being disappointed. And thus a kind of bow of onlookers was formed, with the two tips touching the wall of the house, as if the dead body were an arrow about to be shot through the crowd.

Step by step the group in the room came down towards the group on the pavement. A hearse trotted up, and busy men seemed to take possession of the house. The street waited patiently. The hall seemed bursting with black coats ; it was as if all the life of the upper storeys were filtering slowly down to collect round the body, and were not quite strong enough to float it away, like a swell so gentle that a boat will scarcely rise to it.

Several top-hatted men arrived, dressed in their Sunday best.

The word went round : " The delegates from the club."

Then the undertaker's men surrounded the coffin.

Jacques Godard ! The body was his and



the house was his. That tired body in which life had burnt with a placid flame ; which had suffered, but not acutely ; which had laboured long, until the shaking of a thousand trains had thrown its frame out of gear. . . .

And there was the house where he had lived alone ! The little room which his spirit could not quite fill, because he was a widower who had grown used to stretching himself out quietly and not taking up more than his share of the bed ; the room which used to frighten him a little when he came back from his walks to the cemetery, through the sloping crowded streets and up the staircase drenched in twilight, because it had become peopled in his absence with far-travelled mysteries, and alone and unaided he would have to make it his own again ; the room in which, on winter evenings, in spite of a good fire and warm clothes, he felt naked and shivering, because all round there was something lying in wait, drawing near and seeking him out in the very heart of the house—something waiting for poor Jacques Godard, an ageing man, without wife or child—waiting to snatch him from his niche among all those families, and to grip him as with claws. . . .

Here he had lived and here he had died. Between the hall and the fourth floor was a tract of space that bore his imprint. His going and coming had worn a groove in the

soul of the house, and now for the last time he passed along this rut that he had made. But the body did not obliterate his tracks as it passed, and when the mutes put their thick hands on the coffin, though they broke the invisible thread, they could not tear it away. Nor, when they poised the coffin on their shoulders to shoot it into the hearse, did it seem as if they had made away with the whole of Godard himself, and it could not even be said that what remained behind was merely his roots. So many things had fled with his last breath—an innumerable swarm scattering to the four winds.

Still, a great effort had been made, and this effort went on. The death had kneaded the house closer together, breaking down old separations, and making the inmates less eager to think about their grievances. The porter ceased to look disapprovingly at the bank clerk or to reserve a special smile for the tenants on the first floor. But the house itself seemed surrounded by a frigid zone isolating it from the houses round it ; all connecting links were abolished, and, perhaps for the first time, it was conscious of its boundaries. It was as if the other people in the street lived across a frontier ; their faces, ironical or dull, were hostile. Why did they look like that at the people who had come to the funeral ? What was it that struck them

as funny in the hats, the frock-coats and the dresses ?

A woman on the second floor, who had been born in the country, said to herself that things were very badly arranged in Paris. "One ought to be able to buy everything that's necessary in one's own house. There ought to be a baker and a butcher, or, better still, one shop where you could get everything, and then there would be no need to buy from outside. A house here is like a village in the country. There ought to be no need for outsiders." Then other ideas came into her head which did not fit in with the comparison. She tried to sort them out, but unsuccessfully, and remained vaguely uneasy.

It was not only the house that the death had drawn together. In distant quarters men had put on their Sunday clothes, and by unfamiliar routes, by tram and omnibus, by streets they were not accustomed to tread, with many false casts and fetching wide circles, they gathered about the coffin.

And in a mountain village Godard's death had pulled an old man out of a smoky room, and had dragged him along a road, despite the stones ; so that, victim of the diligence and the train, handed on from one to another by creatures in whom he had had no choice, the old man had arrived before he felt the desire to start.

From the moment when a man's soul had split into fragments, people had begun to journey towards his death, like troops marching up to the guns. They met, they concentrated, they crammed the house full, and formed a dense little crowd that overflowed into the street. And this crowd was steeped in a particular kind of gloom—the kind that proclaims itself openly instead of hiding in the hearts of individuals, and is neither a pain nor a mystery, but spreads over a multitude like a coating of hard varnish. The crowd wanted silence, not because silence steals into the heart and is the only cup from which souls in pain do not turn with loathing, but to protect itself against the jostling hubbub of the streets.

No one could tell exactly how much of Godard's spirit had been saved by this close-packed gathering. When a servant-girl carelessly breaks a full bottle which she is carrying her hands come together quickly as if trying to catch the spurting wine, and a moment after nothing is left but a few reddish traces in the folds of her palms and a smell as of vomit. The sudden huddling together of human beings was just like this; they were like fingers curling up to catch the essence escaping from the broken flesh. But they were not sure of having caught anything; and when the coffin was in position and the



hearse lurched forward, the people walking in the procession felt an obscure sense of disillusionment.

Scarcely had the procession gone the length of the houses when it felt depressed at being so small. Seeing its scanty straggling ranks, the faces of the people in the street ceased to be envious or sarcastic ; it was as if they took pity upon it, and their hearts melted as the humble company passed by. Men took off their hats respectfully, and women crossed themselves who did not often do so. The street seemed to take under its wing the body thus sorrily honoured, and to communicate its compassion to it directly, without paying any attention to the procession. A square was crossed, and, after going a little way down a narrow street, the procession turned into a boulevard planted with trees.

On the right hand was a tram line. The funeral took the middle of the road, and looked still meaner. Yet chests expanded freely, and no one was afraid to hold up his head. The boulevard was so broad, with such a great space of air, that any crowd must look petty beside the wind that blew along it, and, as the very houses made no attempt to join forces across the road, it did not matter whether the procession were large or small. Presently they were out of the quarter and absorbed

again in the great town, which was in no hurry to assert its rights.

Scarcely a thought was given to Jacques Godard any more. Stupefied by fatigue and the excitement of new surroundings, his father had ceased to feel any definite sorrow. But he was frightened, and wondered whether he would ever see the village again. The others thought about their own concerns or talked in couples. They talked of Godard without listening to what they said themselves. They said :

" One good man the less."

" Oh yes, he was a good fellow."

" I scarcely knew him."

" Who would have thought he'd have gone so quickly ? "

Thus the phrases left their lips and mingled with the chill air of the boulevard, without the transference of a single thought. But all the time, at the bottom of their hearts, in those regions of the soul that do not think, something was swelling and fermenting—a desire to overflow and join hands across the trivial chasms that part body from body, a growing promiscuity, a riot of tiny, blind, intoxicated souls hustling and humming like a crowd at a wedding.

The sky cleared. A vapour rising from behind roofs seemed like the upward flight of some happy creature. Clouds passed,

aimless and calm. Everything existed in the moment and nothing seemed ephemeral. The procession felt that kind of happiness that makes one say quickly to oneself : " I made a great mistake in being gloomy a minute ago. What is there to complain of ? Why worry about trifles ? I'm beginning to live now."

A hand-cart with an assortment of sweets and cakes spread under a little awning of painted cloth jolted by, close to the pavement, and the sight of it increased the cheer of the walkers and whipped their souls into eddies. They became voluble, and told long stories that required gesticulation. Memories came crowding into every head at once ; the image of Godard seized the opportunity to mingle with them, and, as if taken by the hand, was swept away in a circling dance that forced it to seem happy. One patch of sky was bright blue, and if the houses on the boulevard were barriers, it was merely as its banks are barriers to a river. The procession resembled a fleet of boats, with the memory of the dead man wandering in and out like a white swan. One of the tenants regretted having only given half-a-franc towards the wreath.

" I might have made it twice as much. I should never have felt it, and it would have made me happier to-day."

The old man realised that he would have no difficulty in getting back to his village. The

steps he would have to take seemed to him to follow easily on one another. He even called up a clear picture of the moment when he would be sitting again in his chimney corner, and he knew that nothing would prevent that moment from coming. His face brightened as he looked at the hearse, and thought how pleasant it would be to tell the old woman all about it.

This general sense of well-being was far more beneficial to the dead man than tears had been. Since his heart had stopped beating he had never expanded thus. Every thread between him and the body had been severed, and, leaving his carnal part to rot in the coffin, he was free to multiply himself and take possession of a hundred living frames.

Then someone thought: "It's a terrible long way to the cemetery," and said so to a woman beside him. A third person heard, and all three repeated: "Yes, a terrible long way." At once a feeling grew up that the hearse was going too fast, with sudden slowings-down which tired the legs, that there were too few people in the procession, and that the streets were greasy as well as hard. This disturbed and diminished the dead man's happy existence. Such violent mental transitions made it precarious, and it was as if two limits were set to it, one by the town and one by the future. "We've more than an hour



more of this," was the general complaint ; but everyone knew that in two hours all would be over, and their minds dwelt upon that.

After the boulevard there suddenly came a crowded street, with strands of traffic twisted together like the threads of hemp in a rope, and the lower part of the houses expanding exuberantly into shops and encroaching on the pavement. Just as mirrors that face one another toss every reflection backwards and forwards like a ball that goes bouncing away to infinity, so the house-fronts silently kept up a rapid to-and-fro of forces across the turmoil of the roadway, and the people in the street walked as under a tunnel of crossed swords. On entering this street the procession felt a kind of pain, or rather a sudden sinking of heart, as if most of its virtue and strength had gone out of it, and it had all at once come down in the world. Its soul shivered and shrank, like a drop of water falling on red-hot iron. The street was not even conscious of its presence. It was forced to walk behind a lorry loaded with timber, which rumbled on very slowly, making at regular intervals a noise like a catastrophe. Cabs and motor cars passed it obliquely, shaving it so close that each rush nearly chipped off several of its members. It was so unimpressive that no one pulled up for it, and it could deflect no

movements but the flabbiest from their path. Children, errand-boys, women with bundles, paddled across it, and many people pierced it unawares. Others saluted it absentmindedly, or turned their heads away to save the trouble of taking off their hats.

Then from the street to the procession there passed a genuine sense of content, a foretaste of happiness, but frail as yet, in which the dead man had no place. The procession gave up asking for notice or claiming any importance, and felt that merely to walk along this street would do very well as its aim in life. It had scruples indeed about admitting this humble pleasure, which looked too much like resignation. To enjoy it without reservations, the procession should have been created here and have known that here it would end ; it should have sprung into being in the street with the natural expansion of a rhythm, slipping in among the other forces quietly, as one greets one's kin, and expecting, in return, to be resolved into their essence without hope or fear of any life beyond.

Thus it moved on for several minutes, in harmony with the street. Peace settled on it, and its soul acquired a kind of pleasurable uniformity.

Gradually it began to fancy that the street was uneasy. The idea was repelled at first, as if it were a false impression, but presently

it became evident that something was happening. All movements on the pavement and in the street became more and more troubled ; a deep, universal disturbance made itself felt, such as could only be due to some violent cause. The air, too, seemed heavy and at the same time agitated, not by wind, but by some subtler and stronger substance, which swung in great sweeps from right to left, from left to right, throbbing in men's heads like their own blood. Grown-up people quickened their steps and children started running ; the whole street was rejuvenated by excitement. With chests leaning forward and legs taut, bodies tore themselves sideways from the ground, and the trees and gas-lamps looked by contrast more motionless than ever.

A couple of hundred yards ahead a thick black crowd was seen blocking the way.

" Oh, look ! "

" What is it ? "

" Probably an accident."

" What a crowd ! If it's an accident it must be a serious one."

" There's too much noise for an accident."

" It's not them that are making that noise."

" If it's not them, who can it be ? "

" Yes, it's them."

" Look, look, they're fighting."

" It's two thieves being arrested—or it's a murder ! "

"Here come the police! At the double! One, two! One, two!"

The black mass ahead twisted and changed its shape like something scorching in a slow fire. The funeral procession was tormented with desire; the men would have liked to break into a run and jump into the middle of the crowd, but they had to walk behind the hearse and pretend to be calm. And it was as if the hearse, no longer bearing the dead man in its heart like a seed within its fruit, were squeezed inside a tight shell. The dead man surrounded it and gripped it from outside.

Still, they were getting nearer the crowd, and getting nearer like this, step by step, was one of those pleasures that grow acuter the longer they are drawn out. Brains were in a turmoil, full of a pell-mell rush of ideas. Every ten yards a new theory was started, the slowest heads throwing off conjectures with ease.

"It's costermongers."

"Or wrestlers."

"But there wouldn't be a crowd like that, right in the middle of the street."

"It's a couple of roughs fighting and the respectable people are looking on."

"No, no; don't you see the barriers? It's a hole for the underground railway; the pavement has fallen in, or they're doing some work that's amusing to watch."

The procession crept on, and still the question



was unsettled. Then the crowd surged wildly and a great noise went up from it in which isolated cries could be heard, as individuals made their wills felt.

"Now I've got it! It's a scrap between the strikers and the other lot; the police have come, and they're hitting out."

"That must be it. It's the navvies. Look at their hats! And they've got their tools with them."

Policemen, with bodies bent forwards, pushed into the crowd of workmen, which closed upon them. Round the men who were fighting pressed a ring of others who had come not to fight, but to look on; and over this enveloping crowd there passed, with every convulsion of the crowd inside, waves of excitement like the heaving of a woman's breast. The fight, though it swirled violently about and broke the straight lines of the traffic, did not seem a thing apart from the street. There were no boundaries, no hostility, between the street and it. Even people in a hurry were pleased to stop, and the shops were not nervous about their windows, so broad were the pavements.

The funeral was now only fifty yards from the huge crowd strangling the roadway. Slowly it crawled on, clinging to the hearse, and the hearse rolled from sett to sett, pulled by its two horses which, with drooping heads,

sniffed the back of the master of the ceremonies. Head and tail of the procession were so far apart that the single thread of feeling that ran its length was differently coloured in different places. The rear ranks grew irritable and said, "We're only marking time."

The master of the ceremonies, seeing the crowd blocking the way, was anxious to turn back, but the procession pushed him from behind silently, but so firmly that he did not dare give the order to halt. Here and there people in the hinder ranks, their patience exhausted, left their places and wormed their way right up to the hearse, and then, dismayed by the violence of the tumult at close quarters and its apparent impenetrability, their impatience changed to uneasiness and they fell back to the rear again to screw up their courage.

Thus, driven on by impulses that recoiled on themselves, and by desires that, once satisfied, turned to fear, the procession moved on like a fascinated animal.

Suddenly the uproar died down. The cries became hesitating, and, one after another, could be heard coming sharply to a stop; a sort of murmur began to spread over them, covering up and smothering them. Then the murmur itself faded, and there was silence, a silence terrifying as a spasm, while all movements were arrested and tense muscles were relaxed.

The navvies, after hitting out, let their arms fall slack. The rush of the police died away as the crowd fell back. They said, "Make way for the funeral," and there was no anger in their tone.

A chasm opened in the crowd ; it looked immense and gloomy. The procession passed through in great calm. The navvies took off their hats, and seized the opportunity to wipe the sweat from their foreheads. The policemen saluted.

The procession passed on, its true self once more. Its members trembled with pride and joy. Their dead man seemed to them a thing of dread ; they loved and venerated him, as the worshipper loves the god of his choice ; they were one with him.

## VI

THEY entered the church by the little door on the left, crossing the threshold slowly, first one man and then another. Each soul had a moment of solitude in which to draw its first breath of the incense and the gloom.

One by one the great lax spirit of the church brushed them with its touch—a spirit which seemed weak from the vastness of the space it had to fill without resistance. Here and there were people praying—a few women, two or three old men, a young priest—in corners, by a pillar, near a confessional, or in the dim religious seclusion of a chapel. And with whatever urgency they projected their souls from their bodies, struggling in the strange effort to effuse their souls and lift them on high like rising smoke, they felt them growing colder and feebler as they mounted upwards. With the entrance of the procession, this cloud of emotion, so weary of climbing that it faded away along the painted windows, collected and settled down, assumed a shape and became a force, brooding over the new-comers and making them breathe differently, as men do who pass from the valleys to the heights.



Several of the company, who were not used to going into churches, were made uncomfortable by it. Not that they were conscious of anything hostile or cruel. On the contrary, the atmosphere that greeted them was too warmly effusive ; it treated them intimately at once and would not stop at surface contacts. Other places did not give this disconcerting impression of promiscuity, but here it was as if one's clothes had ceased to be a protection, and were incapable of keeping the outside world at a distance. Anywhere else one could wrap oneself up in the sound of one's own words ; but here even that resource was denied.

Down from the vaulted roof the silence sank on to each upturned face, and then passed on, through skin and bone, into the depths of the heart, where every exuberant sally was quenched beneath it. It was not until they were collected in one of the chapels of the apse, which looked as if it were a church in itself, that the funeral-party became conscious of itself again. The walls were high, and the altar far removed. Rows on rows of chairs faced the altar. They sat down, and, when everyone was settled, it was seen that the coffin was there in their midst, supported on trestles and guarded by four candles. Everyone felt the presence of his neighbour as something sad and dear at once. Members of the same family were almost moved to clasp

hands, as on days of deepest mourning. Yet no one wished himself away. How pleasant to sit for ever in this chapel, with its windows of red and blue glass ! It was a kind of back-water, where the stream of life gathered for refuge, without either the desire or the power to flow farther on its way. Bodies sank on to seats with that little shiver of satisfaction that one feels on returning to one's own fireside.

The coffin was in the middle ; they saw it, but without concentrating their attention upon it. It no longer suggested thoughts of the dead man, but seemed merely one more ornament among all the statues and candlesticks. The dead man had escaped from it. Where was he ?

No one wondered where he was ; no one thought fixedly of Godard ; yet there was no soul in which he was not present, discreetly, without attracting notice, threading his way through the congregation.

Women, mumbling over their beads, suddenly thought : " But, if it's true what we believe, he isn't dead, because the priests say that one goes to heaven, or to hell, or to purgatory." The idea struck them as new and disconcerting. " If it's true, he is somewhere at this very moment, and perhaps he is looking at us." They pondered this. " Perhaps he is looking at us ! " The supposition disturbed

them a little, but they did not judge it to be quite absurd. Then the idea returned in a different form : " If he is somewhere, he is not here " ; but this shocked them as an improbability. The more they turned the words over, " He is not here," the less natural they seemed. They didn't seem seriously meant, those words ; they were like those phrases that people throw out without conviction, to see what you will answer. When they said to themselves, " He is not here," they seemed to be saying something like, " I am dead," or " We are murdered."

Then arose a murmur that grew into a growl. It started from no particular point of the church, but filled the whole building, as a throat is filled by the cry it utters. It was the organ preluding, though no ceremony was going forward at the high altar or in any of the lateral chapels. It gave the group round the coffin a shock ; they had not expected this voice, but they wanted it. Some sighed, as at the end of one of those endless days of gathering storm, when the first drops fall at last. A woman unconsciously crossed herself. The priest thought of the dead man. Old Godard felt miserable ; he wept, and as he wept he imagined that his wife was there to weep with him and that the whole village was praying inside the church. The whole congregation remembered what had brought them

there. The thunder of the organ seemed to belong to the dead man. It rose like a flood round the souls of his mourners, displacing them, lifting them, carrying them away in a kind of warm and vital stream. They all seemed to be floating in the blood of some immense being.

The dead man was now so great that he needed no one any longer. To think of him was not to do an act of charity but to yield to a force. He gathered himself together and was created anew. He was the master. A man said to himself: "How they quieted down when we went by! I expect they went on pounding each other afterwards; but at the time they never stirred." The dead man's existence solidified, grew heavier, filled the chapel full, touched the walls and the vaults, and increased the pressure from within on the outside air.

His old father wept without any sense of weariness. Tears were neither difficult to make nor painful to shed. They had no bitterness, and they even did not prevent a strange hope of happiness from making its way into his head. He experienced an emotion which he had not known for years—the pleasure of anticipation. The idea that there would be a to-morrow, and then a day after that, and then other days, gave him a kind of intoxication; his chest expanded and his heart danced in a



tumult such as sometimes thrills a young man towards nightfall.

There was a minute during which the priest was happy to be standing at the altar and going through the sacred motions. "I was quite right to take orders." He recalled old hesitations and recent regrets. "What other profession would have given me the extraordinary joy that I feel at this moment?"

He loved the unknown dead; without picturing his face he loved him, yet not with an impersonal love. At first he tried to imagine him, but unsuccessfully. Was he a youth, a grown man, an old man? No one had told him, and he never asked about such things. He might have made an arbitrary choice, and given him an age, a stature, a countenance. But this would have been an intellectual game, destructive of his emotion. So he gave up picturing him; and thereby the dead man became present all the more vividly, just as one feels someone close at hand in a pitch-dark room, brushing against you and breathing on your eyes. Even so he used to feel God close at hand when he was an emotional boy at college, and during the early years of his priesthood.

Like a whirlwind shut in by the walls of a ravine, the dead man swirled round and round within the boundaries of the chapel, while the little seated congregation was gripped in a kind

of frenzy of parturition, with the organ for the voice of its wailing. Soul after soul was swept away in spiral flight, light as leaves charioted by a sturdy wind. Without an effort the heaviest and the dullest were caught up in the circling dance; though they knew it not, they felt a heaving of the heart, a giddiness and nausea, and their hands pressed in prayer against the backs of seats were like hands that clutch at a ship's taffrail in a heavy sea. The movement was so violent that it could almost be seen. Beneath the friction of the whirlwind the air seemed to sizzle, and smoke to stream up the centre of the chapel, as from an overheated axle.

On the evening of the same day there was talk of Jacques Godard among several families, gathered round their soup and their lamp. Scattered widely over Paris there were spots where someone said:

"I should have thought he was older than that."

"It's not so bad dying when you haven't a wife and children to leave behind."

"He was pretty comfortable for a chap living by himself."

And sometimes the incidents of the funeral would be recalled.

"Ah, that's a lovely church! Very fine for a parish church."

" I do like to hear the organ play. It's much the nicest kind of music."

" Did you see how they quieted down at once ? "

" And a minute before they were hitting each other over the head."

" Very odd ! "

" Yes ; but they began again at once afterwards."

" Still, all the same . . . "

Elsewhere a father would be telling his wife and children about it.

" Everything went off well ; there was quite a crowd. He lived so quietly in his corner, I shouldn't have thought so many people would have turned out for him.

" But the queerest thing of all was what happened in one of the streets. There was a strike on ; navvies and the police knocking each other about. We wondered if we could get by. Such a row ! Stones were flying about. They picked up dirt and stones and bricks and were chucking them at one another's heads. And how they yelled ! We didn't quite like it. One of the fellows near me wanted to turn back. Well, just as we got close up to the shindy, and thought they were going to set upon us and make a barricade with the hearse and the coffin, they stopped all at once, as if by miracle. You should have seen them draw up in lines and take their hats

off. Some of them had bleeding hands, but all the same they took their hats off, and you could see the blood trickling down their sleeves."

The procession was spoken of as something in the past, as a life which had run its course ; it seemed as dead as the corpse it had convoyed. People said :

"It was a very respectable funeral."

During the week some of the tenants in the house thought of the death of Jacques Godard, and the hall porter had his mind full of it. Henceforth the death affected him like a bad omen. It seemed to him that his chances of happiness were diminished because of it, and that he was less well protected against the strokes of Fate. The peasant who knows that there are tiles loose on his roof does not sleep sound on stormy nights. The disappearance of Godard made a gap in the house, as if death, once it had found the way in, could easily find it again, and was bound to do so before long.

Several times, as he passed before his cupboard, the hall porter looked at the reflection of himself in the glass. He was not in the habit of paying attention to this voiceless neighbour who made the same gestures as himself, so that he had even lost all clear idea of what exactly the connection was between him and the reflection. Now, under the spur



of a new anxiety, he stopped in front of the glass and stared at his ghost.

"I'm growing bald, and the hair I have left is going grey. And I'm beginning to stoop."

He stood as straight as he could and threw out his chest with an effort.

"Of course I can still stand straight when I try. But it tires me. It hurts my back and neck ; I'm all rusty. I couldn't stop like this for five minutes."

He was aware of a sharp pain in his leg. It grew gradually, in jerks, as if a nail was being hammered into the bone and was going in a little farther at each stroke.

"That's my rheumatism. I haven't had a twinge for ten months, and it's never been so bad as to-day. It's enough to make one scream."

One day, towards the end of the afternoon, he was sweeping the pavement in front of the door. Almost the whole street was filled with sunlight—a clear light, with scarcely any red in it, although the sun was getting low. On the bosom of the fresh blue sky lay clouds light as feathers. The porter lifted his head. He saw the front of the house, and the wall, which was the colour of a skin that is burnt but young, like that of a woman from some hot country, and he saw the windows, which had an enigmatic look. He was more moved than he had been for twenty years. His eyes

were fastened upon the windows, and especially upon certain panes which shone with a deep tawny light. He stared and stared at them, and a nameless emotion swelled in his breast. It was gentleness, loving-kindness, and as it were the apprehension of some supernatural event. In the gleam of the window-panes all kinds of wings seemed to be beating. If the stones had begun to sing, there would have been nothing surprising in it. Neither that evening nor on any subsequent day could he make out what it all meant.

Certain families belonging to the Velay Club from time to time mentioned the name of Jacques Godard, as they sat round the table after dinner, while the mother sewed and the children pored over their lessons. But the memory of the dead man hastened to disappear, or else it didn't seem worth while to recall him in any completeness. If signs were made to him from far off, instead of drawing near, he would disappear without anyone's noticing. Sometimes people would speak of him without even naming him, "Like that gentleman belonging to the club whom you buried a week or two ago." And that was all. Jacques Godard was like a poor man whom the people warming themselves inside a farmhouse see passing along the road, behind the wall of the yard. He does not come in. No one calls him. Nothing is

heard but the sound of his boots on the stones, and it may even happen that the dog forgets to bark.

The old man had returned to his village in the hills. He had passed through the market-town, and climbed the parish road. He had seen the little cast-iron cross ; and he had scarcely set foot on the flagstones near the well when the old woman, recognising his step, said to herself : " He is coming back."

It took a good many days to describe the funeral, and tell what he knew about the death. Each day he took up the story again without hurrying himself, letting it drop when he began to feel tired, or when his memory failed him. And each day he added some detail which he had forgotten until then.

The old woman sat and listened, her hands upon her knees ; now and then she lifted her right hand up, shaking her head as though she would express the helplessness and misery of man. When they ceased to talk and began to bestir themselves, the house felt rather less empty than it had before the death of their son. It seemed garnished and completed. The air inside no longer gave the feeling of a void. It was as if a door which had been open for a long time, letting in the outside cold, had been at last finally closed. They felt more sad and more at peace.

In the village no one talked about Jacques Godard any more. Only when they met old Godard did people remember the dead man ; but they said nothing, out of compassion, and the effort they made to be silent gradually got them out of the habit of even thinking about Jacques.

One day the postmistress called from her window the same little boy who had brought the telegram to the Godards.

" Will you take a telegram ? You know, the same as you did before when the man died in Paris and you ran so fast ? "

The urchin opened his eyes wide, and did not understand what the lady wanted to tell him.

The flat on the fourth floor was let for the midsummer quarter. " Respectable people ; a young artisan and his wife, no children, " said the porter.

He was on excellent terms with these new tenants, and nothing happened to make him regret their predecessor. He could pass and repass with letters, stop on the landing, knock at the door out of which the coffin had passed, without his memory saying a word to him. One day he went into the room where the dead man had lain. The young couple had turned it into a little dining-room ; a canary sang in a cage by the window, hopping from perch to perch like a thing possessed.



The porter looked at the bird and made a joke. He did not think of the dead man.

But one day it happened that he thought of him—for the last time. It was a winter evening; sitting in his lodge beside the fire in front of the glass, he forgot his daily duties and indulged himself in thoughts with no practical purpose. The image of Jacques Godard appeared to him, fairly clear, and for quite a long time together; he made no effort to see him more precisely or to drive him away. When it went away, it never occurred to him that he would not see it again.

Another winter evening, old Mother Godard came home coughing. She had been out gathering fir-cones and fir-needles in a little wood on the side of a hill which faced the north. It had snowed three days before and the snow had not yet quite melted.

"You've got a cough, eh?"

"Yes; I've got a little cough."

The old woman said she would go straight to bed without eating, and she did not even feel up to making herself a warm drink.

"What? You're not fit? You don't want to show you're ill, that's what it is. Oh, I know you. If you mean to get into bed without a sup of soup, you must be ill. I'll make you something hot myself, as you're too tired."

He asked no questions, and she made no complaints, but they were certain, both of them, that she was going to die.

At first they were each certain of this apart from the other, quite apart. The old man pretended to busy himself about the hearth, arranging the logs and the pots ; the old woman put on her most placid expression and stretched herself out in her bed, with her face turned to the fire, its familiar light playing about her forehead and reflected in her eyes.

Then they shared their certainty together. In spite of the effort each made to pretend the other did not know, they could not keep it up. At the beginning, they said nothing ; the old woman merely stopped looking at the flames in order to rest the back of her neck against the pillow. The old man dropped the little branch he was holding, and with his hand shaking put the pot in the corner of the chimney, and sat down on a stool. They thought together that one of them was going to die. They did not think of this in a flash, but ruminatively, like people who are talking together. Mother Godard did not say to herself : " I am going to die." She said : " The old woman is going to die." And the coming event did not seem to concern one of them more than the other. At last, they spoke.

" You understand ? It's not worth my while to drink it."

"Why not?"

"I am telling you it's not worth the trouble."

"You fancy something else?"

"Neither it nor anything else?"

"A poultice?"

"I do not need anything."

"Yes, you do. You wait and see."

"No more need to make hot possets for Mother Godard!"

For his part, he felt very sorrowful. But he was sure that this sorrow would not last long. Since the old woman was dying, he would die too, a little sooner or a little later; he would not die of an excess of grief, as young men do whose souls one fine morning are suddenly stricken within them. He would come to an end naturally, inevitably; just as the parts of a dead body decay, one after the other, without each having to die a separate, violent death.

Then a drop of water fell on the floor with a light tap; another drop fell; then others irregularly. The old man did not put himself out to look where they came from. But this new sound of dripping made him aware of the tic-tac of the clock, which he had not yet noticed that evening. The drops and the seconds fell alternately.

The old woman heard it too; it made her feel more than ever that she had begun to die.

The regular sound seemed to be disintegrating her little by little. This was her own way of dying, the way her last hours were being measured out.

"I am sure I am going to join our Jacques," she said.

He did not protest.

"And even that I haven't got long to wait."

Both of them understood that it was absurd to live any longer; they felt as though they had outlived themselves and were keeping others waiting.

The old man had a real longing that this night should be his last; he thought that Mother Godard was not to be pitied, for she was sure to go before him.

"If she dies to-night," he thought, "how shall I manage to-morrow?"

To-morrow seemed a fearful ordeal to him, one he would not have strength to bear, and yet which he would bear all the same.

The old woman spoke with difficulty:

"Go and tell M<sup>lle</sup> to fetch a priest."

Old Godard went out without a word.

She remained alone, her body stretched out in the middle of the bed, her head flat upon the pillow; her soul shrank together, as though nestling into a corner, but her thoughts remained clear, and she suffered more from uneasiness than fear.

The sound of dripping had stopped. The



seconds seemed bigger ; each passed by with solemnity. The old woman felt a sort of exaltation. Sorrows and troubles of bygone days thinned away like vapours.

" My Jacques died this spring," she repeated to herself.

The recollection of it filled her, but she felt no sorrow at it. Her son's death and her own were no longer calamities. Were they even misfortunes ? It was not that she hoped for a meeting between mother and son in God's paradise. She believed in another life ; and if anyone asked her, she would have said at once : " Yes, I shall see Jacques again in heaven." But this idea meant nothing definite to her, nor did it suggest anything she could imagine happening soon. It was from another source that she drew her extraordinary serenity, and that kind of cheerfulness which made her hasten towards death as others go to supper.

Vaguely and dreamily she told herself it had not been worth the pain to miss Jacques so much. " One reckons things out all wrong and tortures oneself in the dark." As she came nearer and nearer to death, she understood that this is no terrible country. People pity the dead, but they are not to be pitied. The room was only lighted by the glow from the hearth. The quivering flames and jumping shadows had subsided ; she saw nothing

now, and yet she did not feel the darkness oppress her. It seemed to her that she was being carried upwards ; as if with each tick of the clock she was raised one degree higher. This regular sound was the sound of a machine at once mysterious and yet simple, like a winch which, by little jerks, hoists you higher and higher, higher and higher.

As soon as she was buried, old Godard began to die. He felt himself going down into nothingness with momentum, more heavily weighted than others. For it was not himself alone that was dying. Mother and son had gone without heaving their last sigh, and that sigh was there, in his own breast. It lay there, filling his own lungs, waiting impatiently the hour which would release it.

The death-struggle, in which the body did not suffer, lasted four or five weeks. It came to an end one morning when the day broke on the snow, and the fowls were clucking in the barn without daring to go out. Within the walls of the house were only the old man and a woman, a neighbour, who looked after him in her spare moments. He uttered a few words of which he alone knew the meaning, for he wanted to make words express something unusual. "He's wandering in his head," thought the good soul, "that's a bad sign." She continued busy about the room,

moving backwards and forwards from bed to window, from dresser to fire. The old man did not speak again. She did not know exactly when he died.

One day an express made up of ten coaches was crossing the plain of Saint Denis, full of cheerful passengers enjoying the first rush from the station. The engine-driver felt happy, almost gay, but with a gaiety which was neither egotistic nor frivolous. He recalled his fits of high spirits as a schoolboy and as a young man, and it seemed to him, looking back, that they had been coarse and generally cruel. Then suddenly he saw again a face he had known, and he heard again a voice, a voice more distinct than voices usually sound in the ear of memory. He was disturbed and even touched.

“ Who was it ? ”

He hunted about in his mind for a long time, without ceasing to keep an eye upon the signals and steam-gauges.

“ Who was it ? ”

The face kept appearing and disappearing as though the flying steam were unveiling and veiling it again. The voice reached him in gusts ; it spoke only broken fragments of sentences ; but it might have been the voice of someone present.

The train was going at a great pace. It

had reached a place where the line curved a little. The driver ought to have slackened speed. The memory which had haunted him inspired him with a kind of exaltation and daring. He did not touch a lever or turn a handle. One heard the wheels on the right pressing against the rail, trying to grip it and grinding down on it. The whole train resisted the twist like a sword which is forced into a curved scabbard. And on the face from the past was a look of exultation.

The world went on, and no one thought any more about Jacques Godard. He did not appear in anyone's dreams ; no one caught a glimpse of him at the end of an avenue of memories ; his face did not rise up when some familiar object changed its place, and no man, warming himself in the chimney corner, or walking alone in a public place, thought he heard his voice.

He was lost like a scent in the air. And this is what happened to him at the moment when he touched the very bottom of non-existence.

It was about the beginning of the month of March. It had rained all the morning and up to the middle of the afternoon. The cloud which had weighed gloomily upon the town became a prey to a kind of heroic agitation. Between dull, grey clouds appeared scraps of sky, infinitely pure and pale. Any man who



raised his head to look at them might have believed in any dream, however wild. The sky was a much lighter blue than the blue eyes of the most phantasmal children. The fondest hopes, the faith of the soul in its own sovereignty, the idea that holiness has its place in the world, the persuasion that the universe is not a mere brutal adventure, all tender thoughts which the press of events scares away, and which hide behind other thoughts to escape being laughed at for their naïvety, dared to show themselves and to come and go beneath a sky which resembled them. It seemed as if the ideal was really part of the world, and the world was acknowledging it at last.

A young man was walking down one of the boulevards which skirt the fortifications round Paris. He had reached the age when the fits of credulous enthusiasm and despair by which youth is tossed are becoming rarer, but when the soul is seized by the fear that it will never really love anything again. The close of this day gave him courage once more, and inexhaustible longings.

As he paced the rain-soaked paths, the bare branches moving in the wind seemed to hasten still more the race of the clouds above. The light of day was rising from the earth and gathering in the sky like a benediction.

The skin of his face felt a little cold, just

enough to wake in him a vivid consciousness of the rest of his body, and to brace him satisfyingly, but not cold enough to cause him any discomfort. But the sky and the hour itself both combined to make the great town shiver with a larger ecstasy. An empty boulevard is the very place to feel this thrill in all its majesty. On it came, slow and all-enfolding, wave after wave flowing on one behind the other, with time for the shock of each to relent, and recover, and push home in one long, smooth motion.

The young man took part with every nerve in this passionate drench of emotion. Outwards, from some invisible centre, the beneficent circles of feeling dilated until they reached and touched him. He received them without any surprise, but, little by little, they made his walk less steady. A footfarer along the outer boulevards of Paris, who, at close of day, has an end in view, must make some effort of self-control to hold on his way and not to forget his object.

For there comes over him a strange longing to be off and away—a kind of nostalgia for exile. The familiar places he frequents attract him no longer ; his ordinary occupations seem mean to him, and he yawns at the thought of carrying out any plan he may have in hand.

The young man walked on without definite

aim ; he had no fixed course to protect against vague desires. Nothing hindered him from obeying an obscure impulse to cross the ramparts ; to jump into a tram and stay away for hours together. It was a sentiment, and not an effort of will, that kept him from yielding to the desire to escape. He longed to be somewhere else, but he was inwardly convinced that he would not be as happy anywhere as on the naked boulevard. He was peculiarly sensitive to the urge of the town ; he felt it against his right side, intense and reiterated, like a beating pulse. His soul received it, and transformed it into confused words that clamoured for new destinies.

Certainly he was filled with a kind of joy—a joy at once active and aggressive, such as does not fear to be extinguished by a breath, nor trembles at the approach of a casual occurrence. He had never felt so intrepid. He aspired towards the fullest satisfaction. His soul absorbed the great wandering essences of things and grew immeasurably big with them. What might have overwhelmed his soul, only forced it to feel a still vaster capacity for expansion. His joy was one of those which nothing can satisfy.

He would have liked to be younger, to begin half of his life again in order to live it in the new way that he seemed to have discovered this very evening ; and he would have liked to

grow older in a minute, so as to pounce at once upon the fairest days his future had in store, as on the only prey worthy of his lust.

He felt cramped in the present moment and on this spot. Walk on and on, live on and on as he might, he would always be plodding along the same, dull straight line. He longed to be off in every direction at once, and to spread himself over every instant of time. He panted for ubiquity. There was pain in the thought that anything existed where he was not, and that time was like a wire—all length and no breadth. Every street of the town, a junction of streets in its heart, the last house on its farthest edges—he wanted to have them all, clustered close round him, here where he was. He could not bear the idea that trains were rushing away ; the whistle of an engine half heard, like a wail from the tormented heavens, gave him a little stab of pain in the chest ; that distant gliding over the rails, that journey begun, that impetus, that cry—he could not reconcile himself to it ; he hated the thought that that unknown train was free, that that thing over there could go away and shake him off, leaving between himself and it nothing but a colourless stretch of space shot through by a cry of betrayal.

Again, he thought of the suburbs that sprawl over the hills towards the south. He thought of the little countrified houses on the farther



edge of the suburb, in the valleys where they grow flowers. And he felt like a man who has given everything up.

A memory flashed across his mind and disappeared. He had no time to recognise it ; he only felt the taste of a deep, sad happiness. After a minute, the memory appeared again ; it drew near hesitatingly, ready to turn tail ; his soul began to perceive it, and endowed it with a shape. It unrolled itself as the performance, on a day of sunshine, of some action which took time and had a certain solemnity. The young man realised that it had something to do with a procession, and a procession in which he had taken part himself, not without emotion. At last he said to himself :

“ It was a funeral—a funeral last year.”

He saw himself once more in the middle of the little crowd, somewhere in the fifth or sixth rank, with men on his right and left. There came back to him, with the force of something actually felt, the collision of the funeral with the street fight, and the pride and pleasure he had felt a minute later when the crowd divided and they passed through. Again he heard the organ rumble. And, more vividly than all, the expansion of their being which the congregation had felt in the chapel came upon him again. He enjoyed recalling this expansion ; it was like the emotion the boulevard had

given him, though in the chapel it had been more powerful and less unsatisfied.

Then he asked himself: "Whose funeral was it?" For a moment he had no idea. "Oh yes, it was an old friend of my father's, one of his mates; they had known each other on the railway." Having made sure of that, he wanted to know more. What was the name? He waited, thinking at first that it would come back of itself; then, after an interval of patience, he began to rummage for it. "He was called . . . he was called . . . I haven't the remotest idea." He tried to catch it by stealthily groping. He began to say names over to himself, not absolutely at random, but choosing them from those which hovered before his mind, indistinguishable as a crowd of midges. "Lenoir . . . Renoir . . . Gaspard . . . Bonnard . . . I am certain I knew the old fellow's name . . . Bonnard, Bonnet . . . Boulard." At the name Boulard he stopped himself. "I believe that's it . . . Boulard. . . . Boulard." It gave him pleasure to keep hold of those two syllables, and to rivet them like an iron nut in the centre of that vast, floating mass of memories. Then he began to doubt again. "It was something more like Gaspard. . . . Yet, I don't think so. . . . It was a more uncommon name and not so ugly. . . . Yes, that's it: Boulard or Bonnard."

He caught himself attaching a great importance to this detail. "I am an ass. Is it worth racking my brains about! Besides, I know what his name was: Boulard, old Boulard." But he could not convince himself of it. "If it were worth the trouble, I would try to stop thinking about it. But then it would go on worrying me till to-morrow." He determined to proceed methodically. "I shall go through the letters of the alphabet in order. I am pretty sure the name ends in 'ard.' If I can remember the first letter I am saved."

For several long minutes he kept himself at it. Then, as his efforts came to nothing, he felt discouraged.

A passing vehicle soothed his mind. It was an empty waggon drawn by three horses, ponderously trotting and without apparent effort, the traces hanging slack between them. The driver sat on one of the shafts jolting about as if the life were being shaken out of him. The waggon occupied the young man's attention for a few minutes. He caught from it a little vibration which brushed the surface of his mind, and a deeper, less conscious disturbance. He felt a craving for speed. These three horses were jumbling painfully along; but they were hurrying with a good will. "A bicycle ride would be nice," he thought; and he imagined himself astride his

machine, thrusting down the pedals with his feet, and shooting forward to where the boulevard made a curve in the distance. "And round the corner?" He repeated the words "round the corner" to himself, and his energy suddenly became limp. "It is true. There is absolutely nothing I want to do. The prospect of this evening sickens me. I can't even say I shall be in such and such a place. Of course, I *shall* be somewhere. That is just what is so depressing; one always lands somewhere.

"I," he continued to himself, "I only want to go on walking. And it isn't so clear and simple as that either. At every step I take I regret the steps I might have been taking in some other direction. I should like to be over there, in the suburbs, where the gutters run across the pavement. And if I was, if I went out by the next gate in the fortifications, I should be just as discontented."

So it was; he wanted to do nothing, and to want to do nothing was the last thing he wanted to do.

The young man raised his head, as if to see if this thought could stand the stare of the sky from between the clouds. He met its gaze, more pure than azure, and yet it seemed in harmony with him.

He felt astonished. He had expected to be stimulated by some vehement exhortation,



not to say reproach. The wistful gaze of the sky seemed to approve, and its indulgent tolerance disturbed his soul. He began to seek for some excuse for it, and while he was hunting for one, he thought again of the man who died the year before.

But what he felt was no longer merely the fun of focussing a memory or rummaging for a name. A thrill rose within him and made his cheeks tingle with cold, for it seemed to rise out of the very bottom of his being, or from lower still, from below even the pavement on which he stood.

"That man died last year. I am certain. I was at his funeral. We took him to the church and we put him in the earth. I was not sad. Nobody cried. Yes, perhaps one old man . . . and yet ! The sun was shining. It was later in the year than it is now. How I remember every detail ! I can still see the face of the priest at the altar. And in all my body now I feel that very emotion the dead man stirred in me."

He looked about him. The wind was quieting down, or, rather, it was no longer blowing in gusts. The trees, no longer tossed about, were bending all one way. A train whistled, and the sound was like a weapon slowly plunged into some patient, suffering creature's side.

"Well, he was a man who died. That is all."

He kept hold of this idea and he perceived it was filling his heart. It persisted so vigorously and with such amplitude that he said to himself: "This is the first time I have ever really thought about death. I have used the word in talk, of course, and meditated vaguely about it. I have said mechanically, 'We must go some day.' I have quite understood that my life must end. In hours of joy I have felt that this life bubbling within me was not immortal. But I have never thought about death."

The words, "future life," "the beyond," "paradise," "nothing," fluttered before his eyes.

"It's true that I have reflected on all these things, and for a long time together. I have discussed them with myself and with others. At one time I tormented myself over them morning and evening. Broudier was just as passionately interested in them as I was. We squabbled over them for hours together."

He was certain all the same that he was now thinking of death for the first time.

"To-day it is the real thing, not mere phrases and ideas. We used to talk about death, repeating what we had been taught. We talked about it as boys of fourteen talk about women. To-day, it seems to me, I know death as well as if I were dead myself. It seems to me that I could probe the very heart

of the matter if I had a little courage and took a little trouble. But one hasn't courage; one walks, one breathes, going through the same more or less regular movements; and all the time, while one is doing that, the soul gets drowsy."

He experienced vividly that indolence of a soul which refuses to lend herself to great efforts, and is well content if only the limbs are kept in motion, so that she may be let alone. He resigned himself to his soul having her way and dozing off to sleep. Her aspirations were no longer a tumult; she longed no more to exist at every time and in every place. The thought of a street far away in a distant quarter of the town gave her a cold shiver. The life-breath of the town, like the scent of an opening flower, touched her, enveloped her and spread beyond, but it no longer soaked into her.

A flock of sheep appeared at the corner of the boulevard, trickling, like a big drop of some viscous liquid, half in the roadway and half on the path. The day was closing in. The fading afternoon light hung at a little distance from all those woolly backs, floating in the air above them, like an exhalation from the flock.

The young man looked, and his heart grew large. The outline of the muddy, moving mass shifted perpetually.

Here and there some of the animals would

break away from the mass, now to the right, now to the left, but without becoming completely detached. One felt that a certain substance united them, a good warmth in which it would be pleasant to plunge one's hands, and rummage for something at once glowing and opaque and strong, something one could really grasp and handle and knead, which would reveal itself as an entity with a definite shape and still sticky with the juice of life.

"Life, life, life!" He absorbed himself in the word and repeated it passionately, finding in it a volume and power he had never found in it before. "'Life!' It is more than a mere phrase. 'Truth and Justice!' What a difference when I say that and when I say 'Life!' How intensely it exists! How solid it is! If anyone were to ask me where it is, I should only have to plunge my arm into this flock of sheep."

"Someone—a nobody," he went on to himself, "died last year. Yes, for a year that man has been dead. Dead!" He walked on a dozen paces in a sort of astonishment. Then he began again: "Of course, he's not the only one to be dead. But the others, the thousands of others, mean nothing to me to-day. It's him I am thinking about, nothing but him. I feel as if I were carrying out his last desires."

He stiffened his knees, pushed his hat back,



pulled the lapels of his coat and blinked his eyes hard, like a man half awake who braces himself for some difficult enterprise. He had no precise idea of what he should do. "If I were a magician of long ago, I should call up his shadow. I need to see him face to face, and he needs to be called back. What an extraordinary adventure! He is dependent on me, and yet he dominates me."

The flock of sheep drew near. There was something greedy in the way it crawled. It knew not where it was going; did it even see the road? It had no uncertainty or hesitation; its very blindness added to its energy.

"There are always plenty of magicians. I should only have to consult a somnambulist."

And, while a smile flickered in his eyes, he pictured to himself a den full of stale air, some back shop looking on to a yard, rags straying over the furniture, fantastically chequered shawls, a round table, a mud-coloured carpet, and, elbows on table, a raddled woman, with baggy, white cheeks and black nails. He imagined the interview, the questions and answers. The idea, amusing at first, presently became irritating and disgusting. "That's not the sort of thing we want, the dead man and I." His strange emotion would vanish if he tried to grasp it in any such clumsy way. It demanded words to express it, and deeds to satisfy it. But everything was too gross for it.

"What I am after is some sort of survival after death. I am certain that this dead man exists, now. But all phrases play me false, all theories revolt me. The beyond, better world, spirit, ghost—all those vulgar catch-words annoy me. I must drive them away. Otherwise, they will end by becoming an obsession, and I shall not be able to see anything any more."

He felt a desire to climb to the top of the ramparts. The bank sloped steeply. The grass was so thin that his feet slipped on the mud. It needed a slight exertion, and the young man could feel the play of his muscles, and, quite clearly, the beating of his heart. He was conscious of his body with a precise and full awareness, and a sort of tenderness took possession of him. He thought of his body; he possessed it affectionately. "My body is alive, I am alive; I can climb a rampart; I can even climb fast; I am not merely alive, I am young."

The thought made him feel sad rather than proud. "I am a fragile, precarious thing." Then: "I ought to have thought about it before, and more often," he reproached himself. "I should have loved myself more. We don't love ourselves enough. I know exactly what I mean. It isn't egoism."

The daylight, though gradually dwindling, was taking on an air of solemnity. The wind

was like a bellying curtain, through which great events might step upon the scene.

The grass on the rampart was grey and meagre. Underfoot, it resisted pressure, like a mass of little springs ; but it, too, was shaken by the wind, and, without a branch snapping, the leafless trees bent before the wind.

The young man walked on, with the town on his right. Far beneath him lay the boulevard, and he seemed to be on the same level as the nearest roofs, behind which other roofs were visible, all with their chimneys. An immense twilight lay over them all.

"One day I shall die in this town, no doubt ; I shall die in this thing on my right. I wonder what will be left of the thing that I am."

He thought of the funeral again, and remembered that from the church to the cemetery he had had a sour taste in his mouth which came from indigestion. He even recalled the curious tone of voice in which he had replied to the inquiry of a woman : "I think the gates are shut at five o'clock."

Then he had a sensation which he had never known before. As he glanced in the direction of the town, he felt astonished at being shut up in his own personality. It came upon him with irresistible self-evidence that his soul did not exist merely in the place where he was saying "I." "There is nothing compelling it to

exist precisely here. Why on earth should I ever have thought there was ? ”

At that moment he was conscious of a supreme lucidity. He enjoyed a clearness of vision greater than is given to mortals. He compared himself to an eagle gazing at the sun. Then suddenly it all became blurred, and everything seemed to slip away from his grasp. “ It’s impossible to say anything true about anything. It’s impossible to grasp any truth, except when one isn’t trying to.”

He turned towards the town again, and, without trying to make any discoveries, without any effort at meditation, he gave himself up to the influences round him. The strange feeling he had had a moment ago returned. “ I am on this rampart ; I am walking on the grass, I feel it underfoot ; I feel that inside my head I am thinking about it all. Well now, if someone were to tell me that at this moment my soul is over there, down in that valley which the boulevard makes, between the roadway and the walls of the houses, it wouldn’t strike me as silly, or even as surprising. If I were told that it is changing its position, darting far away, or wandering from right to left, at this moment, at this precise instant of time, I should have no difficulty in believing it ! ”

He ran his eyes over the scene, as if he expected to see his soul tacking about in the offing.



Then, it seemed to him that the man they had buried both existed and did not exist at one and the same time. When he thought of him, his mouth was filled with the sour taste of non-existence, a savour as of ashes beaten up in spittle. But he also felt that at that very moment the existence of the dead man was permanent and secure. And in this he perceived nothing contradictory. His mind did not grapple with it as with a problem ; it was just a confused impression that one breathed in.

“ This would be the moment for me to die. Very likely, if death were to come for me from the depths of the earth, I shouldn’t have the courage to yield without a struggle. If I were certain that a thunderbolt was about to fall on the spot where I am standing, if I saw it pointed at me from that little grey cloud, I expect I should run away.

“ Yet, I am sure that I should not disappear if I were to die now. I should pass just as I am into a great soul that cannot die. And, in crossing the threshold, I should not be forced to leave anything behind. The great soul would go on with the thoughts I am thinking to-night, without any effort ; not one after the other, but all together. These movements I am making would be taken up again, though not in any human measure. The movement of my chest as it rises and falls, the movement

of my heart, even the swing of my arm hanging from my shoulder like a pendulum, not a single rhythm would be lost. There would be alternations, jerks, expansions, oscillations, circling eddies, in which all my carnal acts would appear again, multiplied a hundredfold. The lowliest gesture would become a phase. My death would merely be the courage of self-expansion to my utmost limits. Yet I do not desire it, and, frankly, I am afraid of it.

"Yes, it would be the development, not the rounding off, of myself. To round myself off, I have merely to be simply and sincerely the man that I am; I have no need to go beyond myself or to do violence to my outlines. Whence, then, that restless intoxication that seized me just now; that passion to be everywhere, and that pang of pain when the train whistled? But, round myself off as I will, I shall never be able to enjoy the delight of it."

A vast, vague noise dominated the world. Everything was steeped in it. It came from nowhere in particular. The whole air felt like the inside of an organ pipe. Through the young man's body, from his feet to his hair, there ran a shiver which he knew was not of himself.

"Dead man, dead man," he said, "you see that I have not deserted you. True, you have no mouth with which to complain and protest; but an hour ago you had nothing at all. Am

I not kind to you ? Will you say that I could not have done otherwise ? No, I consented, I made a choice, I picked you out to love you. And for reasons tainted with nothing of mortality. I never saw you in the body. I never loved your voice, your appearance, your way of looking at things, the mere precarious husk of your being. My desire was for your very essence."

He walked on, uplifted, to a corner of the ramparts ; the moat gaped deep beneath his feet, and behind his back was the town.

" Yet, it is little, it is too little. I will have nothing to do with it ; I want more. I must have more. To catch like that at the first passer-by, at a casual meeting, that will never be enough for me.

" Oh, the horror of it ! And to think that perhaps it is all nothing but a memory !"

At this thought there was born in him a despair so violent that it turned at last to resignation.

" Nothing but a memory ? If I had not been at that funeral I should not have thought this thought to-day. And then he would not even have had that much of existence. And even that tiny scrap is in the past already. A memory ! And a memory in me ! So much flesh and blood shrivelled down to that !"

The night rose from the moat like an exhalation. In front, a fringe of the town obstructed

the view, turning its back on the sky like a creature without hope. Nothing could be more firmly planted, more solidly nailed to the ground, than those factory chimneys, but the trails of smoke coming out of them waved so naturally that they seemed an effusion of pure movement.

The young man clenched his hands and moved them a little away from his side, as if he were carrying two pails of water. He was conscious of feeling anger and a sense of power. The world around him was like an empire half conquered and still struggling. Boiling in his body, and surging out to his fingers, he felt a force that could master the universe. Indignation was his, a lust like a fury of revenge. The dead man was speaking to him in accents of complaint.

"If I were to stretch my whole being taut," the living man said to himself, "if I were to concentrate my every energy to a single point, I am certain I could recreate what has been disintegrated. I would constrain the immense flood which beats against my loins and shoulders to plunge into an abyss, as into a funnel; it would fall into the shape of a soul, as into a hollow vessel, and there would burst from it a howling without end. It would be the day of the Resurrection, of the first Resurrection.

"But I know it, I feel it, that I am weakening.



The springs within me are snapping or relaxing. The calm that I hate returns. Through my body a fatal serenity is beginning to steal; the pricking of my skin subsides, washed in a drowsy balm. I am going to be placid, a little tired, and, O horror, satisfied! I am going on living, with my own rhythm and in my own place, sometimes a few beats ahead of my fellows, sometimes a few beats behind, never keeping time. And on some future evening I too, another nobody, shall be dead."









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